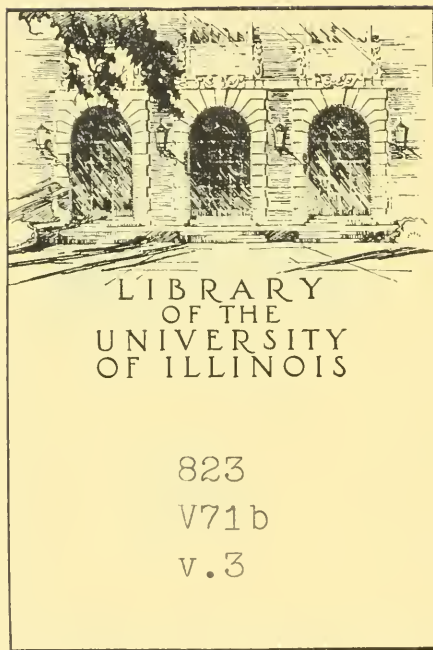


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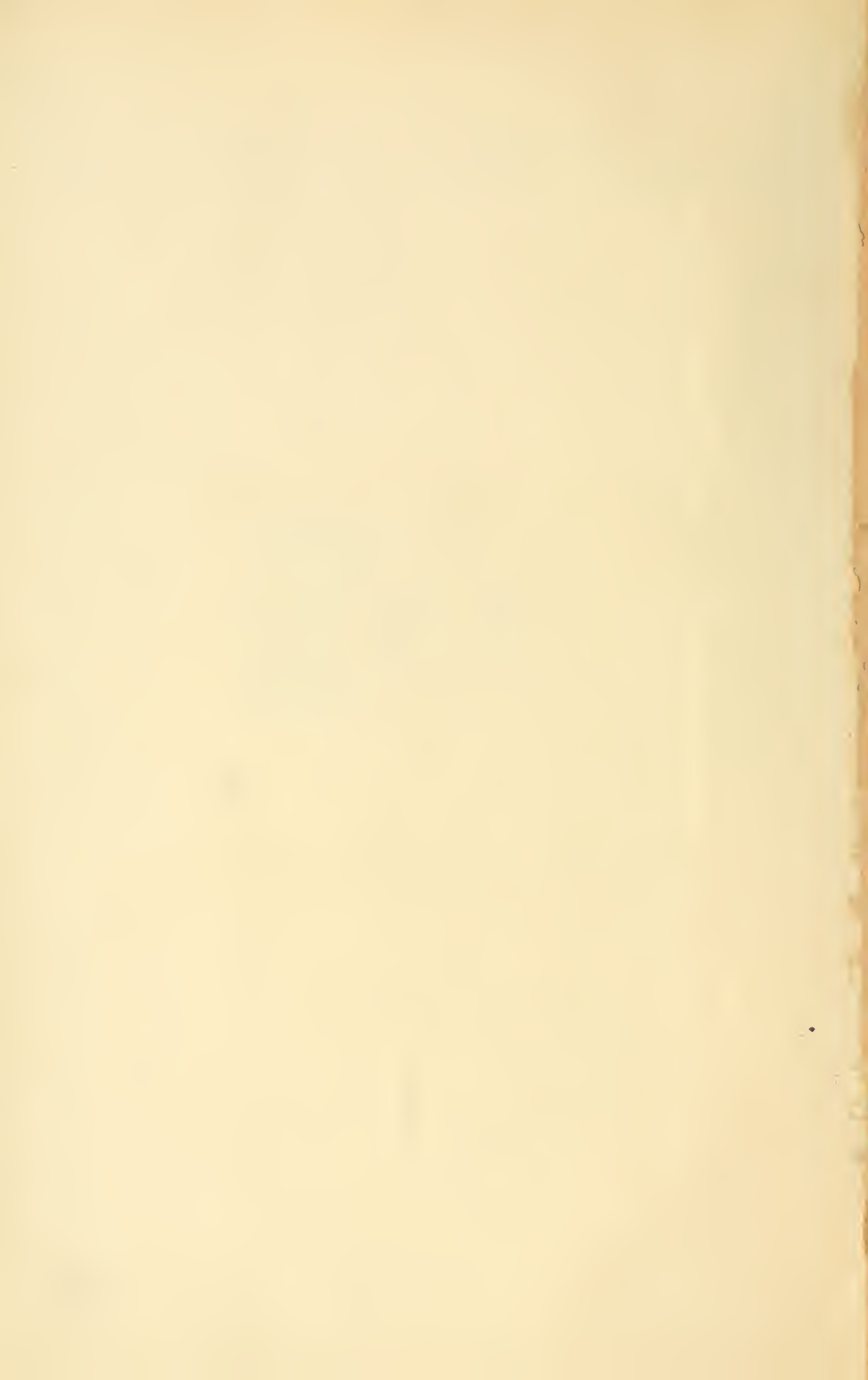


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[CLAUDE DUVAL'S PECULIAR ADVENTURE.]

CHAPTER DCCCXXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS IN TIME TO PREVENT THE PERPETRATION OF A FOUL WRONG.

THAT such a mistake as the one we have just described should take place is not at all wonderful, for by the old man's manner it seemed as though he had been for hours expecting the approach of some one, and seeing Claude, as it appeared, about to stop at the gates, he jumped immediately to the conclusion that the person he expected had arrived.

This was the solution Claude himself put upon it, and as he did so, this difficulty arose in his mind:

The failing eyesight of the old man might have disabled him from distinguishing a stranger from the person he expected; but the voice would be another matter.

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No. 173.

When Claude spoke, would not the deception be at once discovered?

"Oh, Master Jack," he continued, addressing him, and walking on by the side of his steed, "I have been watching and waiting for you so long—watching and waiting until I have grown quite weary, and when I heard you approach my joy was so great that at first I could not move! Oh, it is time that you came back to your own! If you only knew how much your father regrets his harsh treatment of you, you would forgive him. He, too, longs for you; but the dark spirit is at work, and—You understand, Master Jack?"

Claude made a murmuring sound, which he hoped would be significant of assent.

The old man took it so, and continued with the garrulity of old age:

"Your cousin is there; he is with him now in his bedroom, sitting at the side of his dying bed. He does not

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know that my eyes have been upon him, but they have—they have! He has been importuning your father to sign a will that will revoke the one he has already made, and alienate all this fine property from you and bequeath it to him. But your father has held out till now, though he is weak, very weak, and his ear is still poisoned by that false tale which your bad cousin fabricated."

Still Claude was silent, and the old man, turning to him, said:

"Why, how quiet you are, Master Jack:—I don't say a single word. But I don't wonder at your silence—I can account for it. Your heart must be heavy indeed. In a day or two, though, you will be able to tell me all that has occurred, and to glad my poor heart. And how is Miss Ellen now, and the little one? You see I call her Miss Ellen still, although I ought not to do so; but the familiar name came to my tongue's-end before I was aware of it."

"They are well—very well," returned Claude, purposely speaking as huskily as he could, so that it should be hard to recognise the exact tones of his voice. "But my heart is indeed heavy," he continued, "and you must not ask me many questions to-night."

He waited with considerable anxiety to see what would be the result of this speech.

If he could pass muster on this first occasion, he would have good hopes of being able to sustain the deception sufficiently long for him to secure his own safety.

He noticed with some misgiving, however, that the old man started, and turned his eyes inquiringly upon him.

"Why, Master Jack," he cried, "how strangely you speak—how your voice has altered!"

"Has it?" returned Claude, with greater confidence. "Perhaps it has, and so have I changed in my appearance, if you could but see me. It is very many years now since we met, if you will recollect."

This was a bold assertion, but, fortunately, Claude's guess was tolerably correct.

"Yes," was the answer, "to you it may appear many years, yet to me, who have lived on this earth so much longer than you have, it seems a mere nothing. But parting is over now, I hope."

"I hope so too."

"It will be a glad day when you take possession here. The people will regret your father's death, but they will rejoice when they find your cousin is not heir, for he is universally detested."

Claude was again silent, for he could not tell exactly what to say, and, having been successful so far in his guesses, he was unwilling to run the risk of discovery.

"The sympathies of all are with you," continued the old man, "and with Miss Ellen. They are all sorry for Miss Ellen, and while they blame your father for his harshness, yet they cannot help pitying him for being so led away by Ralph Davids."

"I am glad of that," Claude ventured to remark.

"Well, now, dear Master Jack, just tell me what you intend to do. Will you not walk in boldly, and, in spite of all obstacles, make your way to your father's chamber? He will be glad indeed to see you, and your scheming cousin will be quite discomfited."

Claude reflected.

"No," he said, at length. "If you could get me into the house quietly, I should prefer it."

"Why so?"

"Because then you could lead me, perhaps, by some unfrequented route to the chamber where my cousin is. I should like to witness what takes place with my own eyes."

"Then you shall do so," was the answer; "and perhaps it will be better so. You know the way, Master Jack, as well as I do."

"Yes, yes; but I will leave my horse, and then you can accompany me. I am so agitated and troubled to-night that I feel as though I must have you with me."

The old man seemed very pleased and grateful for this speech.

"If you wish your arrival kept a secret, we will fasten your horse to this tree, and then creep slowly towards the house."

"Just so," returned Claude, and while he spoke he slipped from the saddle.

His horse was secured to a tree, and then, with cautious footsteps, he followed his strange guide across the lawn.

On his way, he reflected a little on the singular position in which chance had placed him.

For the present he had no doubt that he was perfectly safe.

The officers might search for him as long as they liked—they would never find him.

It was impossible, however, for Claude not to feel grateful to the old man, who had so unintentionally befriended him, and, from what he had heard, he could easily surmise that without some active interference a great wrong would be perpetrated.

That active interference he resolved to make.

He had no longer to trouble himself about his own position. He should be able to direct all his energies to the one object before him.

These were the reflections that occupied his mind as he followed the old man to the house.

He was careful then to keep in the rear, for he had not the remotest notion of where he was going.

In a few minutes afterwards, the old man paused.

Claude wished that he could learn his name, so as to address him by it.

But it was scarcely likely that he should hear it pronounced, although the old man might consider it singular that he should never call him by it.

Opening a little side door in the mansion, he passed through, and stood aside for Claude to enter.

He crossed the threshold quickly.

The door was closed behind him, and he found himself in perfect darkness.

"Take my hand, Master Jack," cried the old man.

"There, that will do—I can lead you now. I do believe that I am more familiar with this old place than you are, for I could find my way anywhere about it in the dark."

"Yes, yes—don't trust to me in the least," murmured Claude. "I feel so completely overcome that I am not capable of taking the lead in anything."

Slowly, so as to avoid making any sound that would discover their presence, the old man advanced.

A flight of stairs was descended, a long corridor traversed, and then there was a pause.

"This is the door of the dressing-room," exclaimed the old man. "If I could manage to open that quietly, and we entered, we should be able to see and hear almost everything, for the inner door is nearly always ajar."

"Good!" said Claude. "Listen first—then try."

The old man listened, and then gently opened the door.

A feeble light appeared beyond.

Every care had been taken to prevent any unpleasant sound reaching the ears of the rich invalid.

The hinges of the door had been oiled on this account, and therefore the old man was able to push it open in perfect silence.

A hasty glance showed him that the dressing-room was vacant.

Claude looked eagerly over his shoulder.

Just before them was another door, standing partly open—the door evidently that communicated with the bed-chamber.

In this a light was burning, and those rays that streamed through the doorway served to light up the dressing-room to some extent—sufficient, at any rate, to enable Claude and his guide to avoid coming in contact with any article of furniture.

Breathlessly, and on tiptoe, they stole to this door—then paused and peeped in.

A spacious, handsomely-furnished bed-chamber was disclosed, filled with rare and costly articles.

Upon these, however, Claude's eyes did not rest for a second.

All his attention was immediately concentrated upon the two sole occupants of the room.

CHAPTER DCCCKL

IN WHICH IT TURNS OUT THAT THE MISTAKE WAS A MOST FORTUNATE OCCURRENCE FOR ALL PARTIES.

ONE was a man apparently about thirty years of age, though he might have been older.

His hair had a reddish tinge, and his face, which was flat and dull-looking, was disfigured by an immense number of freckles.

In his small, twinkling, ferret-looking eyes, however, was visible a peculiar expression—one of mingled rage and triumph.

He was standing by the side of the bed, on which, propped up, into a sitting position by many pillows was the invalid.

This was a man old and emaciated.

His face wore already the hues of death, and on his forehead perspiration clustered in large drops.

Lying before him on the bed was a sheet of paper, upon which a few words were written.

The old man held a pen in his trembling fingers.

"Sign," said the young man, somewhat sternly—"sign, ere it is too late!"

"I cannot—I cannot!"

"But I say you must! Would you leave all that you have to one who has treated you with so much contumely, and has brought upon your honoured name nothing but the deepest disgrace? I say, would you, after all, reward him for his conduct?"

"No, no! Give me the pen—give me the pen! I will sign!"

"You have it in your hand."

"Oh, have I? Yes—I see—here it is—I had forgotten. Now, where is the paper?"

"Lying before you. Can you not see it? Do quick, or it will be too late!"

With a manifest effort, the old man put his pen upon the paper.

He made a few scratches, and then, with a long-drawn breath, fell back apparently dead.

A shout of rage burst from the young man's lips upon the occurrence of this accident.

"Curse him!" he cried, with savage vehemence. "Curse the old rascal—how I hate him! One moment more would have done the business, and now, after years of successful scheming, I find myself baffled at the last moment. But it shall not be so—it shall not be so!"

Quick as thought, this young man picked up the pen, and, after glancing hastily around him, wrote something on the paper.

"There," he said, "that's well done—much better than he could have done it himself. I have practised signing his name too often for anyone to be able to say this is a forgery. My story will be believed. He, I know, has publicly given it out that he would disinherit his son and make all over to me. I will say that, finding death coming upon him suddenly, he requested me to draw up this memorandum, and had then only just time to sign it before he expired. It will hold good—ten to one that it holds good."

"A nice article," was Claude's thought, and at the same time he determined that his villany should be balked.

But just at that moment there came a loud uproar from the lower part of the house.

Voices could be heard raised to an angry pitch, which were followed by the trampling of footsteps and the sound of heavy blows.

Immediately after that, footsteps could be heard upon the staircase.

There was a crash—the door that led direct from the corridor into the bed-chamber was dashed open, and Claude perceived a young man enter, who at a first glance bore a somewhat remarkable resemblance to himself—so great, indeed, that he did not wonder at the mistake the old man had made.

Evidently this was the heir returned just at the right moment.

With a cry of amazement, the old man rushed forward. As for the cousin, Ralph Davids, he stood like a transformed to stone.

Following closely in the footsteps of the heir came two elderly gentlemen, one of whom went direct to the bed.

With a great effort at self-control, Ralph Davids drew himself up to his full height, and determined to put a bold face on the matter.

"What means this insolent, unwarrantable intrusion?" he demanded. "Begone! I command you all to leave not only this room, but this building! I am master here now, and will be obeyed!"

"Villain!" cried the heir—"villain! I have heard

the whole story of your detestable arts, and you shall not escape the punishment so justly your due!"

He rushed forward while he spoke, and no doubt would have inflicted some summary punishment upon his cousin, had not one of the gentlemen who accompanied him held him back, though it was with great difficulty that he restrained him.

Ralph Davids retreated to the other side of the bed, where he felt that, at any rate, he was at a safe distance from the intruders.

Then he held aloft the paper.

"Look here," he said. "Read this. You see his lordship now lies dead—he has just breathed his last—not until, however, he had performed what he considered was an act of justice and of duty. That bold, bad man," he continued, pointing to the heir, "you know has been a lifelong sorrow to his deceased parent. You know, as well, that his lordship has avowed over and over again his intention of disinheriting him, yet lacked the courage to take the necessary step. Finding himself suddenly grow worse—knowing, in fact, that the hand of death was resting on his head—he commanded me to write the few lines that you now see; then, seizing a pen, signed his name at the foot. Scarcely had he done so, than he expired. Look, here is the signature!"

He pointed to it triumphantly while he spoke.

"I will read this document," he continued, in tones of the utmost excitement—"I will read it! Listen

"I, Lord John Robert Venners, finding myself on my deathbed, hereby revoke all other wills that I have made, and bequeath the whole of my possessions, personal and real, to Ralph Davids.

"(Signed) VENNERS."

"Now are you satisfied?" the cousin added. "You may say that this deed is without its witnesses, but I will try the law upon this point. I can bring a score of persons who know his lordship's firmly-expressed determination, and then we shall see who obtains the victory."

"We shall see," said the son of Lord Venners, speaking in sorrowful tones; "but I shall bring forward, as well, my witnesses, who will prove that you deluded my poor father by a tale that had no foundation whatever in fact, but which was hatched up entirely in your own villainous, scheming brain."

"I care not!" cried the other. "I am here, for the present, sole master, and I command you all to quit this dwelling! If you refuse, I will have you expelled by main force."

"The deed had witnesses, although they have not signed their names!" said a voice.

There was a universal start, and Ralph Davids uttered a yell of dismay.

At the same instant, Claude Duval stepped forward from the dressing-room.

"I am one of the witnesses," he cried, "and I can give a plain, straightforward account of all!"

"No, no, my good fellow," said Ralph Davids. "You mistake—you mistake! Say nothing—all will be well!"

He accompanied these words with significant gestures, all of which were employed for the purpose of informing Claude that if he kept silent he would be well rewarded.

But he did not know our old friend, or he would never have made any such attempt.

"What I saw," Claude continued, "was this: His lordship was pressed and threatened to sign that paper; but the natural feelings that he had for his own son had exercised their due force, and he hesitated. At last he changed his intention, and seized the pen. He made a few erratic scratches with it, and then fell back, convulsed by death."

The greatest astonishment followed this declaration, and the old man, raising his voice, said:

"Yes, I am witness too. Heaven be thanked that I made so great a mistake!"

"Go on!" said one of the gentlemen who had followed his lordship's son into the room.

"After that," said Claude, pointing to Ralph Davids, "I heard that man mutter something expressive of his determination not to lose this property. I saw him take a pen, and place that signature at the foot of the document, while, at the same time, he stated he had practised that signature many a time before."

"Seize him!" cried one of the gentlemen—"seize him! He shall be arrested on this charge!"

Ralph Davids turned round, and faced his opponents. All traces of colour had vanished from his cheeks, and the numerous freckles on his countenance looked strangely hideous from their contrast to its ghastliness.

"Beware!" he said, producing a knife from his pocket—"beware, I say! I am a desperate man!"

"Secure him!" was the cry, and there was a general rush.

But Ralph Davids was too quick for them.

With one tremendous bound he reached the window, and dashed headlong through it.

Outside was a balcony, and on this he alighted in safety.

He turned for a moment to shake his clenched fist, then leaping over the parapet, disappeared in the darkness.

"Let him go," said a voice—"let him go—we can capture him at any time! The condition of his lordship here demands our entire attention. We shall soon know the truth of this matter."

One of those who had entered with his lordship's son was the physician, and ever since his entrance he had been bending down over the bed.

"His lordship is not dead," he said, in a voice of great excitement, "though I grieve to say life is only just fluttering at his heart. It is impossible to save him, but yet, I think he will be able to recover sufficiently to tell the truth of this affair."

He applied a small bottle to the nostrils of the dying nobleman, the effects of which seemed magical.

In a moment he reared himself upright in the bed, and glared around him with a haggard, frenzied expression.

"Father!" cried the young man—"father—father, they tell me you are dying, but oh, while you have breath left, tell me that you forgive me!"

CHAPTER DCCCXLI.

IN WHICH RALPH DAVIDS MEETS WITH A COMPLETE DISCOMFITURE.

THERE was a deep and touching silence as, while the young man spoke these words, he threw himself on his knees at the bedside of his father, who gasped for breath, and seemed as though he wished above all things to speak.

But utterance was denied him.

Receiving no answer to his appeal, the son continued:

"Father—father, say that you forgive me ere you die! Do not let me live with such a cloud resting upon my future life as your unforgiveness would be! Speak—speak! My cause of offence was slight, and many things, I know, have been misrepresented to you by interested persons. For all these things I have suffered most severely. Had time permitted it Ellen would have accompanied me, bringing her boy; but let me carry to them the assurance of your forgiveness and reconciliation."

"I do forgive you, my poor boy," the old man gasped forth at length—"I do forgive you! Oh, what I have suffered during the past few moments no tongue can tell! When I fell back upon the bed I was not dead, but all power of motion had abandoned me. Of everything that was going on around I was perfectly conscious. I saw the perfidious wretch in whom I so trusted forge my signature to that detestable document, and then indulge in the expression of his triumph. Thank Heaven I have recovered my speech again, so that I can set this matter right. That deed I proclaim nothing, and that will I long since made at the wish of Mr. Miller, there, I hereby decree to express my last wishes."

The young man was much overcome by this declaration, and poured forth his thanks ardently.

Gradually the hand which he pressed between his own grew senseless and ohill, and at length the aged man closed his eyes in death, with a smile upon his lips.

Claude now endeavoured to withdraw, hoping to succeed in doing so without exciting observation.

In this, however, he was disappointed, for the young man, rising suddenly to his feet, grasped him by the

hand, and inquired who he was and what had brought him there at that particular juncture.

"I am a perfect stranger to you all," was his answer, "and what I have done I have performed freely and willingly. As it happens, what I have witnessed now signifies nothing. Accident alone brought me here, and I am glad that I arrived at so opportune a moment. If you will permit me, I will now say farewell."

"No, no—we cannot suffer you to depart thus—I will not, indeed! You must oblige me by accepting some slight token in recognition of the service you have rendered."

Claude bowed.

"It would be churlish to refuse," he answered; "yet if you would allow me to depart, for I have pressing business that requires immediate attention."

"I will not keep you," was the answer. "This way—come with me!"

The young man led Claude from the apartment, and, as he did so, he requested to be made acquainted with more of the particulars of the extraordinary and fortunate mistake that had been made.

Claude readily complied, concealing nothing save his own identity.

As they descended the grand staircase, a succession of heavy blows came upon the front door.

Claude stopped abruptly, and involuntarily his companion followed his example.

The door was opened, and no sooner did it fall back upon its hinges, than a throng of police officers poured in.

Foremost amongst them was a man with disordered apparel and of frenzied air.

He waved his arms aloft, and the slight foam upon his lips showed how tremendous was the excitement under which he laboured.

"This way!" he cried—"this way!"

Then, with a yell, he continued:

"Look! There he is—there he is! You see him, all! Now judge whether I have told you truly or not! Is not that man yonder Claude Duval, the highwayman?"

"It is!" cried one of the police officers, stepping forward, and presenting a pistol. "Claude Duval, surrender yourself to me peaceably or I fire."

No words could possibly express the amount of surprise and consternation visible upon the countenance of the young man.

Never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that the man who had been of such service to him was a highwayman.

Quick as thought, however, Claude turned round, and bounded up the staircase.

An angle quickly hid him from the view of the police officers.

The young man followed, and, with trembling lips, said:

"Can it be true—is it possible that you are the notorious Claude Duval?"

"It is not only possible but true. Farewell, my lord—if such be your title—leave me now to shift for myself."

"Never—never! Do you imagine I could be guilty of such an amount of ingratitude? No! Follow me! At all risks, I will secure your safety."

Before Claude could refuse, he felt himself seized by the arm, and dragged into a room, the door of which was quickly closed behind him.

"Now," said his guide, "follow me! Quick—quick!"

Claude needed no incentive to make speed.

He was aware that his position was critical in the extreme.

That the young man was perfectly ready and willing to befriend him there could, however, be no doubt, and Claude felt that he could not possibly do better than resign himself entirely to his care.

With great rapidity, many rooms were crossed, until a flight of stairs was reached, down which they hurried.

A corridor was traversed, and they paused before another door.

The young man placed his hand upon the knob and entered.

Claude then found himself in a spacious library, the walls of which in every part were lined with books.

which reached from the floor up to the lofty, carved oak ceiling.

A kind of studious gloom overspread the whole place, and there was an intense and peculiar silence also.

Without pausing, the young man advanced to one particular part of the room.

Then, seizing what appeared to be an upright support to the shelving, he drew it towards him, disclosing, to Claude's great surprise, a good-sized recess behind it.

"Now, in there!" he said. "Quick—quick! And don't move on any account, until I come to release you."

Claude started in, and the shelves were pushed back.

Then all was silence and darkness.

So rapidly had all this taken place that he could not as yet precisely comprehend the nature of the hiding-place he was in, nor form any idea of its likelihood to escape discovery should search be made.

Encouraged by the profound silence, however, he stretched out his hands before him, expecting this way would encounter the front edges of the books.

Such, however, was not the case.

A smooth piece of woodwork was before him.

Then he comprehended at once the nature of his hiding-place, and felt a great amount of confidence in it, so cleverly was it constructed, and so likely to escape detection.

One portion of the shelves were fixed, not close up against the walls as the others, but fitted into a kind of box, so constructed that when the books were placed in, the whole had the appearance of a door.

It was opened easily, but by means of a secret spring, unlikely to be discovered.

The officers—supposing that they searched that particular apartment—might take down every book and scrutinise the shelving, and yet discover nothing.

A long time elapsed.

But Claude heard nothing whatever of the officers or anyone else.

The silence, indeed, was most oppressive.

How it was that a visit had not been paid to the library he could not conceive.

The explanation, however, was simple.

The woodwork at the back of the books was lined with many thicknesses of felt, which, in their turn, were covered with another panel, so that all sound was effectually shut out.

Nothing save the greatest uproar could have penetrated to Claude's ears while he remained there.

Slowly the time passed, and wearisomely too.

It seemed an age, indeed, before his friend returned.

At length the cleverly-constructed secret door was thrown open, and Claude once more was permitted to step forth.

"All's well," were the first words that fell upon his ears, "though I had much difficulty in getting rid of the officers."

"Have they really gone?"

"I think they have; but in a few words I will tell you what has happened. Ralph Davids—my cousin, as he calls himself, though I don't recognise the relationship—I have handed over to their custody on a charge of forgery, and, by a heavy bribe, I have induced the officers to give up their search for you."

"This is indeed generous," cried Claude—"it is indeed making an ample recompense for all that I have done! I only hope the officers will not play us false."

"I don't think it. However, if you will follow my advice you will remain here till nightfall. It is now quite light, and if the officers are anywhere at hand you will be seen. Under cover of the darkness you would stand a good chance of escaping."

Claude was profuse in his thanks, and his protector said:

"Here you are quite welcome to stay; no one will interrupt you. As for myself, I have some important affairs to attend to; but when night sets in you may depend upon seeing me again."

With these words, he took his departure, and Claude sank down in one of the huge chairs near the fireplace.

Here he remained until day was gone.

He watched, with great anxiety and pleasure, the

gradual gloom that came stealing over the vast apartment, which at length deepened into the darkness of night.

Still the young man came not, nor did he make his appearance until the old-fashioned clock fixed upon one of the turrets of the building proclaimed the hour of twelve.

He entered hastily.

"Come," he said, "all's well—you will have no difficulty in making your escape! This way—this way! I find your own horse is lame, so I have had one of my own brought out; accept it as in some degree a recognition of the important service you have done me."

CHAPTER DCCXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL RETURNS TO THE INN, AND RECEIVES UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE.

"You are too generous—too good!" returned Claude. "The accident was quite as much to my own advantage as yours, and you may imagine my situation was a most perilous one."

"Well, now I think you may venture to consider that, for to-night, your perils are over. From all that I can learn, the officers have most certainly taken their departure."

Claude was led towards the back portion of the mansion, partly because this was the nearest to the stables, and partly because he was not so likely to be noticed while leaving at this point.

A matchless steed had been brought out, and Claude's eyes lighted up with genuine pleasure as soon as they fell upon it, and he renewed his thanks.

Springing quickly to the saddle, the last farewells were uttered, and, directed by his preserver, Claude left the premises.

The night was yet comparatively young, and when he found himself thus in safety and free from the officers, Claude began to debate within himself whether he should endeavour to find a profitable adventure.

His speculations on this subject were, however, suddenly cut short, for, from round a clump of trees, at no great distance off, a party of police officers appeared.

"There he is," cried one—"there he is! You can see him now quite plain! I told you if we waited it would turn out all right! Now, then, forward, and as soon as you get within range, shoot him down!"

Claude heard this inhuman order, and his bosom burned with bitterness.

But he could do nothing except disappoint the officers of their prey.

Accordingly, he gave his newly-acquired steed the impulse forward, and he observed with considerable anxiety and interest the speed he made.

The result was far beyond his utmost expectations, and caused his heart to bound with pleasure.

At a long, sweeping gallop, which seemed to be the creature's natural pace, and to be performed without the slightest exertion, the horse stretched over the soft turf, and quickly left the heavily-mounted police officers behind.

In vain they plied both whip and spur to their jaded horses.

In a very brief space of time indeed, they had the great mortification to discover that the highwayman had got out of sight, and that there was no chance of again overtaking him.

That little incident served to bring Claude to a decision.

He determined to make his way, in as direct a line as possible, to the inn.

It was with some difficulty that he calmed down his steed, for the animal, having once been put upon its mettle, was by no means easy to control.

At length, just about two hours before daylight, Claude entered the plantation.

Looking up, he perceived the signal that had been agreed upon, showing all was well.

Accordingly, he entered the stable without hesitation.

Crossing over, he entered the building, and was received with a cry of welcome.

Tom King was present, and so was Sixteen String Jack, and Tom Davis, with Maud and Ellen.

"You are both safe, I see," were Claude's first words. "But the captain—where is he?"

"Not back yet," was the reply, "though we are expecting him each moment. Had he returned, I should have tried my luck again to-night with Jack."

"But," exclaimed Claude, "morning is drawing on apace; it is strange he has not made his appearance before this!"

"We have heard from him," said Tom Davis.

"Heard from him? How?"

"Why, early yesterday morning, to our great consternation and alarm, Black Bess came galloping up to the front door."

"What, again?"

"Yes, and without the captain. I must say that it gave me such a turn that for a short time I was not able to move a limb. Darting forward, however, I first of all discovered that Black Bess was dripping wet from head to foot."

"And could you find nothing of the captain?"

"No, nothing but this pocket-book, which was strapped to the saddle; and here, look—on one of the leaves you can find scrawled these words:

"All's well—fear not for me. Back soon."

The pocket-book was handed to Claude, who examined it with very great attention.

"Well," he ejaculated, at length, "this indeed passes my comprehension! What on earth could have induced him to send Black Bess in this manner? He must be aware that she is almost as well known as himself, and that it was almost, if not quite, as dangerous for her to arrive here by herself as it would be for him to ride up to the door by daylight."

"That was my thought," said Davis.

"But you spoke about her being wet—what was the meaning of that?"

"I can only guess," was the reply. "When I took her into the stable I found that the wound in her neck had been bleeding afresh, and I suppose that, in order to allay the pain, she had jumped into some stream."

"It is singular indeed," said Claude, musingly. "What construction do you put upon it?"

These last words were addressed, not to Tom Davis, but to the two highwaymen—Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack.

Claude observed in a moment that they fidgeted about and looked uneasy, as though they wished to say something, and yet, from some cause or other, held back.

Just then, while Claude was wondering more and more at the singular aspect affairs were assuming, his eye happened to rest upon Maud's countenance.

It was as white as ashes.

Even her very lips were white, and her eyes were burning with a strange, peculiar light.

Before he could speak again, Tom King said, with a manifest effort:

"Never mind the captain just now, Claude; suppose you make us acquainted with your adventures. Where have you passed the day?"

"That will do another time," said Claude. "I cannot trouble myself with thinking about that."

"Well," said Tom King, hurriedly, and with the same air of restraint, "since you will not speak, I must perforce give you an account of my adventures; ten to one, by the time I have concluded the captain will make his appearance."

"Do you really think that?" exclaimed Maud, in a trembling voice, and clasping her hands beseechingly together—"do you indeed think that?"

"I do, or else why should he have sent back that message? Rely upon it, wherever the captain may be he is well able to take care of himself."

Then, without pausing, Tom King began an account of his own adventures.

He seemed anxious to fill up the conversation, and to allow no one else the opportunity of speaking.

The fact was, he wished to prevent any discussion taking place upon the subject of the captain's non-appearance.

Yet all could tell by his manner that he was very ill at ease.

"I got safely away," he began, "though I confess I was rather troubled about Jack Marshall and his men."

"However, I saw nothing of them, and made my way

with all speed to the Oxford Road, for I confess I have a greater fancy for that high way than any other.

"The reason is, I suppose, that I have never to look far for an adventure in that direction."

"And so it turned out in the present instance."

"Scarcely had I gone a hundred yards when I heard the sound of a vehicle approaching."

"By the sound I could tell in a moment that it was of a heavy description, though I was at a loss to make up my mind as to exactly what kind of vehicle it was."

"In the meanwhile I made all my preparations, and having carefully primed my pistols, I looked up and saw lights flashing close at hand."

"Then directly afterwards I made out the shape of a large, lumbering, old-fashioned carriage drawn by a couple of white horses."

"In spite of its heavy appearance and ponderous wheels, the vehicle rolled along at a very rapid rate, and, indeed, no wonder, for the coachman as he sat on the box flogged the horses incessantly in order to keep them up to the top of their speed."

"It was clear that whoever was inside was for some reason or other in a very great hurry indeed, and anxious to reach some point as quickly as possible."

"It was not likely, though, that I could allow that to interfere with me, so I at once rode out and commanded the coachman to stop."

"Whether he tried to rein-in the horses or not I can scarcely say; it would have been impossible to check them all at once."

"Under these circumstances I tried our old expedient of firing a pistol over his head."

"On the present occasion it was quite successful."

"With a cry of terror he pulled up."

"Threatening him with instant death if he moved, I made my way to the door of the carriage."

"No sooner did I reach it than the window was let down from within."

"I then caught sight of the form of a very old lady, and so much did her appearance impress me that I must give you a brief description of her."

"She was neatly yet richly and elegantly dressed; her face, though old and somewhat withered, yet was a most pleasing one, chiefly because of the unmistakable air of benevolence that it wore."

"One could tell that she was all kindness and affection—one of those good creatures that are occasionally met with."

"But her face was very pale, and her eyes filled with tears. Her voice was husky with emotion, and yet she endeavoured to assume an air of sternness, perhaps in the hope that she might conceal it."

"Sir, sir—whatever you are," she exclaimed, "let me entreat you to depart—let me proceed! Do not hinder me a moment, for, alas! every second is most precious to me, or rather to one I hold far dearer than my life! Sir—sir, if you are not dead to every human kindly feeling, let me implore you to allow me to pass—do not detain me a moment longer! If you will, I will make you any promise you desire!"

"I confess, comrades, that I was deeply touched by her manner—so deeply, indeed, that at first I could not reply."

"Raising my hat, however, I said:

"You are quite free to pass. I much regret that I have hindered you. I should be glad to render some atonement for it. My life is one of adventure—you know my calling—and I pursue it more for the love I have for adventure than any other cause. If you need a strong arm and a willing heart to assist you, speak—you have only to say the word, and you will find both at your service."

CHAPTER DCCCLXIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING CONTINUES THE RECITAL OF HIS INTERESTING ADVENTURES.

"THE old lady looked at me wistfully, and, clasping her hands together, leaned forward eagerly."

"You can trust me," I said, guessing what was passing through her mind—"you can trust me in all things."

"Then I will put faith in you," she exclaimed, with

sudden energy, 'and if you betray me or deceive me, I will never believe in anyone again.'

"You have nothing to fear," I said. "I am always on the side of right against might, and unless I am greatly mistaken, you are suffering from the infliction of some great wrong."

"It is true, sir; but unfortunately it will take some time for me to tell you all, and every moment is so precious."

"It can easily be managed," I said, "and without any loss of time."

"How so?"

"Why, with your permission I will secure my horse to the back part of this vehicle, and your man can continue to drive you to your destination; then, if you will permit me to share the carriage with you, the explanation can be given as we proceed."

"It is a good thought!" she exclaimed; "be it so, and oh, be quick, though I feel better now already!"

"I hastily carried out the intention I had expressed

"My horse was securely fastened, and I entered the carriage, and the coachman was ordered to proceed.

"Away we went at a rattling pace, and the old lady commenced by saying:

"I must first put you in possession of a few names, and then the narrative will be easier.

"In the first place, my name is Charlotte Chadwick. I am a widow, and have been for many years, and in all the wide world I have only two relatives. One is my dear niece Lillian, my deceased brother's only child.

"By his will I was appointed one of her guardians; her other guardian is my step-brother, William Aldis, a man I do not hesitate to stigmatise as a villain and a scoundrel.

"But you shall hear," she continued. "My poor brother before his death placed every confidence in this William Aldis, and at that time none of us knew his real character, nor believed him guilty of so much baseness as he has since exhibited.

"Such being the case, then, he was left chief guardian of Lillian, and up to the time of her majority he was to hold all her property, real and personal, as trustee.

"For my own part, all I had to do was to bring up the dear girl and see to her education.

"Without vanity, I may say that I have performed my task properly and conscientiously.

"We were always together—Lillian and I—for we were mutually fond of each other.

"We saw but little of William Aldis, who punctually at the proper intervals sent us the instalments of the money as directed by my brother's will.

"And so matters went on peaceably enough until Lillian reached her nineteenth year.

"For a long time past she had been beloved by and engaged to a young officer in the army, who is now at the present time most unfortunately absent from England, though I am every day in expectation of his return.

"Long ere this, Lillian would have been his wife had not William Aldis most positively and emphatically refused to sanction any such alliance.

"He would give no reason for his refusal, and he was firm and obstinate.

"As guardian, he had this power over his ward until she should attain her majority, and Lillian, whose respect for her father's memory amounts to veneration, never once thought of acting in defiance of the man who had been left to watch over her.

"And so Lieutenant Russell proceeded on the foreign service alone, though he had fondly hoped to take dear Lillian with him.

"I believe it would have broken my heart to have parted with her, but yet I should never have sacrificed her happiness to my own.

"It was not long after this that, for the first time in his life, William Aldis became a frequent visitor at our residence.

"Day after day he was there, and at first I was pleased and flattered by his visits.

"I soon discovered, however, that he had an ulterior object in view.

"That was, to make Lillian his wife.

"His first overtures were made to me.

"I answered that I thought he had no chance in the prosecution of his suit, since Lillian had pledged herself

to the lieutenant, and I knew her character too well to believe that she would prove false to her plighted word.

"He scowled angrily, and asked me to use my influence.

"But this I positively declined. I said:

"The field is open, and if you can induce her to be your wife, why, do so."

"I regretted having said this much, for he then began a complete persecution of my niece.

"It was in vain she assured him that her heart was irrevocably another's—that she could never listen to any other suit.

"He tried kind words at first, then appealed to her feelings and revived her father's memory, and, failing, descended to common threats.

"In my own mind I formed a pretty good idea of the exact state of affairs, and trembled for the future of my poor girl.

"Had she shown any signs of weakness—had she not been so steadfastly true to her absent lover—I should have entreated her to turn a deaf ear to her guardian's suit.

"It would then have been necessary for me to give her a reason for such a wish, and that reason would simply have been this:

"I believe that he has unjustly and improperly appropriated and made use of a great deal of your wealth—more than he can possibly replace; and so he seeks, by a union with you, to patch up his delinquencies."

"That, I have no doubt, is the actual state of affairs; subsequent events have gone far to strengthen such an opinion.

"But, as I said, there was no need for anything of this kind; Lillian was as firm as could be wished.

"And so things have gone on up to the present time, or, more correctly speaking, up to the day before yesterday, when I received a letter from an old friend of mine, who lives in a distant county, requesting me to pay her a visit with all speed, on a matter of great importance.

"I, of course, complied, and wished to take Lillian with me; but she was unwell, and, moreover, in constant expectation of hearing from or either seeing her affianced husband, and I could not persuade her to leave London.

"Alas—alas that I left her!

"When I arrived at my destination I found the greatest surprise was manifested at my arrival.

"The letter was produced, and it was declared to be a forgery.

"At first I knew not what to think, and wondered why anyone could have been so unfeeling as to play such a hoax on a person of my age, for travelling to me is a serious matter.

"Then, all at once, I felt, like a flash, that it meant some danger to Lillian, and, in spite of my fatigue, I hastily commenced a return journey, though I was laughed at for doing so.

"On my arrival, I found that my worst fears were confirmed.

"Soon after my departure, William Aldis had requested to see me, and on learning I was absent, had obtained an interview with Lillian.

"What passed between them I know not; but by some means he induced her to leave the house and enter his carriage, which was waiting at the door.

"And from that time to this I have seen nothing of her."

"But," I interrupted, "I presume you have obtained some clue, or else why are you taking your present course?"

"I have a clue—a very slight one. I am told that he is likely to be found at a place at no great distance, in a very secluded situation, which he has lately purchased, and had fitted up in a most expensive style.

"It is there that I am going—it is there that I expect to find Lillian. So great has been my agitation that I have lost my usual coolness.

"Trembling with dread of I know not what, I started off at once by myself, without bringing anyone with me, and feeling quite at a loss to know how I should act upon my arrival, supposing I should find my Lillian there."

"I may be excused," I said, "if I look upon our chance meeting as a fortunate one. Should your suspicions prove correct I will undertake, at all risks, to wrest this girl

from him, and I trust that our aid and interference will not come too late.'

"And I too—and I too!" said the old lady, tears again rolling down her cheeks. 'Oh, he is a bad and desperate man! And, being in this extremity, who can say what baseness he may not be guilty of? Who can say what will be the end of this terrible affair?'

"Let us hope for the best," I said. 'Put some faith in the firmness which, you say, your niece has ever shown towards him—that is all we can do at present, and I do hope and trust that all will yet be well.'

CHAPTER DCCCXLIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING BRINGS THE NARRATIVE OF HIS ADVENTURES TO A CONCLUSION.

"At this moment the carriage stopped with quite a sudden jerk, and the old lady immediately put her head out of the window to ascertain the cause.

"Here we are, mum," said the coachman—"leastwise, as near as I can tell."

"Yes, yes," was the reply—"this is the place, I feel certain

"Allow me," I said, and looking forth, I perceived what was evidently the boundary-wall of a small, pretty-looking residence, the top of which I could just see.

"Do you see the gates, Samuel?" she asked.

"No, mum."

"Drive on, then."

"Stay!" I exclaimed. 'The circumstances under which we are paying our visit are peculiar. It will be better by far not to draw up to the main entrance. What we shall accomplish to-night will be done by stratagem and skill more than by main force. With your permission, we will alight just here.'

"I am quite ready to resign myself into your hands," she answered; then, smiling, she continued: 'This does indeed seem a strange night of adventure. Who would have believed that I should have taken you, a perfect stranger, into my confidence in this affair?'

"I only trust," I replied, 'that you will have no occasion to regret having done so.'

"With these words, I handed her from the carriage, and, going closer to the boundary-wall, began to make an inspection of it, with a view of finding a means of passing it.

"In a little while I came to a small door, that was, however, strongly fastened.

"I succeeded in climbing the wall; but as my companion could not follow me by that route, I dropped on the other side and unfastened the door, which was secured only by a couple of rusty bolts.

"This door I just closed behind us, without fastening it, and as I did so, I said:

"We will now take particular notice of the position of this doorway, for, in case events should make it necessary, we shall then know which way to turn in order to make our escape speedily.'

"But," she inquired, 'how do you intend to act?'

"That is a question I can hardly reply to," I said; 'I shall suffer myself to be guided entirely by circumstances. Come with me. We will, first of all, look all round the premises.'

"She was quite willing, as she said, to resign herself into my hands and allow me to take the lead.

"Stealthily, then, I approached the house and gave a rapid glance at its exterior.

"In this there was nothing whatever remarkable, although it looked a very charming, beautiful place indeed.

"The windows next engaged my attention.

"I could see none that were illuminated until I turned the angle of one wing, and then I saw several.

"One was on the ground floor, and towards that I crept at once, a consciousness within me that if I could take a peep through it I should see something well worth looking at.

"In a moment or so the window was reached, and making a sign to my companion to preserve as much silence as she possibly could, I raised my head and ventured to peep in.

"Curtains were drawn across the window yet not so

closely as to shut out all view of the interior of the apartment.

"Looking in, I perceived standing on the opposite side of the table a young girl, who by her appearance I immediately guessed to be Lillian.

"If any confirmation was required, I had it in the manner in which the old lady clasped her hands together as soon as she caught sight of her.

"Lillian, then—for so I may as well call her—was standing in an attitude of defiance; her eyes were flashing fire; her slim, lithe form was drawn up to its full height; and stern, angry words were issuing from her lips, though, owing to the closeness with which the casement fitted, I could not overhear a single word.

"In one hand she held a knife, that she had evidently hastily snatched up from the table.

"It was raised threateningly above her head.

"Standing on the other side of the table was a man.

"His face was hidden from me, and I could make out but little of his appearance.

"Yet I knew well enough that this was the guardian that had been described to me.

"I waited to see no more, but, grasping the old lady by the hand, led her away for a few steps.

"You saw all that?" I said. 'I suppose I am correct in believing those two persons to be your niece Lillian and her guardian William Aldis?'

"Yes—yes!" she exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with agitation. 'Save her—save my poor girl—save her while there is yet time!'

"Be under no apprehension," I answered, assuringly. 'I merely wished to appeal to you for a little advice.'

"No, no—act entirely as you think proper.'

"Unfortunately, I cannot. You know my position—I cannot interfere in a case of this kind as others would.'

"I do not understand you.'

"Frankly, then, I mean this: After what has occurred, it will be manifestly your best course to give this William Aldis into custody, to answer, first of all, for carrying off your niece—for forcibly detaining her against her will; and then, if necessary, you can prosecute him if he has made use of any of her wealth.'

"Yes, yes—I understand; but yet I would rather be free from him altogether.'

"No doubt you would; but you must consider your niece's interests in this affair. You can understand now—can you not?—that it will be impossible for me to call in the police officers; if I did, I also should be made a prisoner; but," I continued, 'I will enter that room—I will overpower him and make him a prisoner—I will secure him as well as I am able, and after that you must find some means of communicating with the police.'

"The old lady seemed to hesitate; but just then a loud shriek arose.

"It was followed by a tremendous crash.

"I turned round, and saw instantly what had happened.

"Exasperated or terrified at something her villainous guardian had either said or done, Lillian had made one bold spring across the room, and dashed herself through the casement.

"A fierce and angry shout succeeded, and then William Aldis dashed through the broken window.

"But before he could approach the trembling, affrighted girl, I placed myself before him, sword in hand.

"Back," I exclaimed—"back! Your villainy has been discovered and frustrated just in time!"

"Such a yell as William Aldis then gave utterance to, I think I have never heard in all my life before.

"With all the insensate fury of a madman, he drew his sword from its sheath, and commenced a wild attack upon me.

"I was not a moment in ascertaining that I was far superior to him in fence, and before he well knew what had happened, his sword was sent whirling across the garden.

"Meanwhile, Lillian had discovered her aunt, and was clasped tightly in her arms, sobbing and weeping now that the danger was over.

"I followed up the advantage I had gained, and seizing the rascal by the throat, flashed my sword before his eyes.

"Yield," I cried—"yield this moment! I am a desperate



[DICK TURPIN SURRENDERS HIMSELF A PRISONER.]

man, and if you refuse, will immediately put you to death!"

He trembled and shook with fear.

"The man was an arrant coward, as, indeed, anyone might have expected from his conduct.

"Most unquestionably he feared death, and so submitted to me completely, becoming as helpless as anyone well could.

"Accordingly I dragged him back through the window into the room, and forced him to sit down in a chair, and then, by means of the strong cord belonging to the curtains, I bound him there in such a manner that I felt sure he could not set himself at liberty.

"It struck me as being rather strange that I should have met with no opposition from any other persons about the place; but, as we afterwards discovered, there was only one domestic, and that was an old woman, deaf and nearly blind, so from her there was nothing to apprehend.

No. 174.—BLACK BESS.

"Now," I said, addressing the old lady, "your niece is restored to you safe and unhurt I hope. William Aldis is a prisoner, and it will be your own fault if he escapes. Farewell, then, for my service is over, and I have business of my own to attend to. As I pass through the gate I will tell the coachman to drive off at once for a body of police officers; the rest will then be perfectly easy. Farewell to you both!"

"But, aunt," I heard Lilian cry, "who is this—who is it that has so befriended me, and why does he leave without giving me the opportunity of thanking him?"

"I turned at once, although I had gone several paces.

"It may seem churlish on my part," I exclaimed. "but the fact is there may be great danger to me if I linger longer here. As to who I am, don't let it matter, suffice it to say I am your friend."

"But who—who?" she asked.

"Yes, your name," added her aunt. "I am only a

woman, yet some day, if I know who you are, I may be able to render you a service."

"I hesitated a moment, then exclaimed:

"My name, since you must know it, is Tom King—Tom King, the highwayman!"

"With these words on my lips I turned round again, and, with rapid strides, made my way to the little door.

"According to my expressed intention, there I found the coachman waiting, and I immediately sent him off for the police officers.

"Mounting my own steed, I turned his face homewards.

"Somehow, whenever I have an adventure of this kind, it casts a singular gloom over me—a gloom that I cannot shake off.

"I was in no humour for another adventure, no matter of what kind, and therefore it so happened that I arrived here much earlier than Tom Davis expected.

"It was a profitless excursion altogether, but I think Sixteen-String Jack has a different account to give."

With these words Tom King ceased, and Claude Duval would very willingly have put off Sixteen-String Jack's narration till another time, and confined himself to a consideration of the captain's probable position.

But as for Sixteen-String Jack himself, he seemed to the full as desirous of preventing the conversation from dwelling on that topic as Tom King was.

Therefore, with an air of restraint, and yet with an affectation of jorality that could not but be noticed by all, he commenced as follows:—

CHAPTER DCCCXLV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HEAR SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED TIDINGS OF THE CAPTAIN.

"It's a string of adventures I have had!" commenced Jack, "and so be prepared to listen. In the first place I made my way to the North Road, partly because we have not visited it for a long time, and partly because I was tired of adventures without any booty attached to them, and I knew very well that was the place to look for what I wanted.

"A good gallop across the country quickly brought me there, and I reined in my steed in order to rest him a little, and also that I might listen whether any traveller was approaching.

"Scarcely had I assumed this position than I heard some one coming on at a regular jog trot. The pace almost told me the character not only of the horse but his rider.

"A grazier, I'll warrant!" I muttered to myself.

"My mind was made up at once as to how I should proceed. I drew back into the shadow of the hedge so as to allow him to pass me, while I ascertained how far my surmises were correct.

"I found them completely verified. He was a stout man mounted on a cob as stout as himself. His attire was old and greasy.

"He was so intent upon urging his horse forward that he did not perceive me, and I waited for him to get a little distance ahead.

"Then emerging from my place of concealment, I followed at a pace only a little faster than his own, but yet of course one that could not fail to enable me to overtake him.

"Ere long I caught sight of his bulky figure in advance, and in a few minutes afterwards placed myself beside him,

"I was intent upon having some fun at his expense, so I accosted him with the utmost respect.

"At the same time I plucked my hand into my pocket and drew out about a dozen guineas, and as I did so I said:

"This proceeding no doubt fills you with surprise, for, to the best of my belief, we are perfect strangers to each other, but we appear to be journeying in the same direction, and therefore I should be eternally obliged if you would take charge of this gold."

"He stared at me in blank amazement, as well he might.

"Perhaps he thought I was a little mad, but I continued:

"The request seems a strange one, but let me inform you, a little way behind us are three or four very ill-

favoured-looking rogues—highwaymen, I should say, if appearances are anything to go by. I was heartily glad to avoid them, but they are following, and I have no doubt they intend to rob me."

"The grazier seemed rather alarmed, so I hastened to reassure him.

"Mind you," I said, "I don't think for a moment that they will attempt to rob you—it is me they will look after, because, judging by my outward looks, they will conclude that I carry the most money about me. So therefore I beg you will take charge of this, the bulk of my wealth, so that if the rascals search me they will find nothing to reward them for their pains."

"While thus speaking, I thrust my hand into my pocket and drew forth about a dozen guineas.

"I held them towards the grazier, and renewed my request that he would take charge of them.

"I can assure you he looked very much astonished indeed—in fact, his countenance was quite a picture.

"It was hardly likely, however, that he would distrust me on this account.

"I asked him to take charge of my money, which was a widely different thing to asking him to let me take care of his for him.

"Yet it was rather unwillingly that he took hold of the coin, and then he exclaimed:

"Well, it's a very strange notion this indeed. I don't mind obliging you. I have passed these highwaymen before to-day, and have always got off well."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered, "and I hope if those rascals behind do ride up that you will keep the money safe."

"Oh, never fear—never fear! And I'll tell you why I seemed rather unwilling to grant your request; it was because I shall have to let you into a secret that I wished to keep locked up in my own breast."

"What may that secret be?" I asked.

"Why, just this: you will have to know where I carry my money, and that's what no one else knows except myself."

"You may depend that, out of gratitude merely, I shall keep your secret," I answered. "Pray put my money where it will be safe, for unless I make a great mistake, I can hear some one on the road behind us."

"The old fellow looked quite alarmed, and said, hastily:

"Well, if I must tell you, I keep it tied up in the tail of my shirt. Let me ask you if a highwayman would ever think of looking for it there?"

"Never," I answered, emphatically—"it's the last place I should have thought of."

"Well," he said, "I shall make some large purchases to-day, and so I have got a good round sum with me, and mostly in bank-notes."

"With much pulling and tugging, the old fellow got out the tail of his shirt, and I found that he had not been joking, for tied up in it very securely was something that looked very much like guineas and bank-notes.

"I could scarcely control my laughter, because I knew what was coming.

"He chuckled again and again about his cleverness.

"I will put yours in a separate place," he said, "if you don't mind."

"Oh, I am quite agreeable," was my reply; "and if you like I will hold my money the while."

"Still unsuspectingly enough, he gave me back my dozen guineas, and I slipped them instantly into my pocket.

"As quick as thought I drew out my sword.

"Now, my good friend," said I, "as there is an end to all good things, so there is a conclusion to this joke. I have found out your secret, so just decide which I shall take, your money or your life, for I am determined to have one or the other!"

"The grazier seemed quite panic-struck, and his eyes and mouth opened to a most alarming extent.

"Oh, sir," he said, "have mercy—have mercy!"

"Oh, yes," I replied, "I am quite inclined to be merciful. I want nothing but that little supply of cash which you ought to have been robbed of long ago; and beware how you deceive a highwayman again!"

"The old fellow must have noticed that I was rather off my guard, for all at once, when I least expected it, he dug one of the spurs into his horse's flank, and made

the animal bound along at a rate I should never have believed him capable of accomplishing.

"I uttered a cry of rage, and then set forward in pursuit, thought my anger quickly changed to mirth when I saw the grazer making vain and frantic attempts to stuff the tail of his shirt in again.

"In a few moments I was level with him, and resolved to have no more delay.

"I seized hold of the booty, and with one stroke of the sword cut the tail of his shirt off completely, and here it is."

Despite the anxiety that all felt, it was impossible to repress a hearty laugh, and for several moments the roof of the old kitchen fairly rang again.

Jack held aloft his trophy with great glee.

Then, untying it, disclosed a good round sum in notes and gold, as the farmer had said.

"Bother these things," he cried, alluding to the bank-notes, "they are almost useless to me. I have a good mind to carry them about me, and should I ever meet him again I will give him a chance of buying them back at a reasonable rate."

There was another laugh at this, but Sixteen-String Jack took it quite seriously.

Then Claude, imagining the right moment had come, took advantage of a pause in the conversation to speak.

"Well now," he cried, "all the adventures have been told; there are no signs of the captain at present, and I think we ought not to put off any longer a discussion upon where he is likely to be."

Just then he saw Maud turn pale, and fall back half fainting in her chair.

"I think," said Tom Davis, rather gruffly, "that you are alarming yourself without due cause. Give the captain time, and I will be bound he appears. What do you think he sent that note for? He meant us to remain quite easy until he appeared. Just wait a moment and I will read it to you again."

"Oh, I know all about that," said Claude, impatiently, "only such a long time has elapsed I think it strange he has not appeared."

"Let us give him till daybreak, at any rate," said Tom Davis—"ten to one if he would think of coming back before then, if he had the opportunity."

"Then you have not long to give him," returned Claude, "for in an hour, or even less, it will be quite daylight; the dawn must be now almost here."

A deep silence followed these words—a pause that seemed to have something very ominous about it.

Maud was slowly recovering herself, and the others, with averted eyes, were each waiting for some one to speak first.

But the silence endured and remained like a spell.

Then Claude rose, and, going to the window, let down the shutter.

As he did so, a clear grey light came pouring into the kitchen.

"It is already daybreak," he said. "Behold! Where is he now?"

Again there was a silence.

But this time it was broken in upon by a most discordant, unmelodious sound—one that made them all start, and one that actually caused the blood to rush back to their hearts with a sickening sensation.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Tom Davis, as he sprang up from his chair and then sank down again—"goodness gracious, what's that?"

CHAPTER DCCCXLVI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN OBTAIN SOME UNEXPECTED INTELLIGENCE AS TO DICK TURPIN'S WHEREABOUTS FROM THE ITINERANT NEWSVENDOR.

THE hideous sound came again.

This time, however, they were more prepared for it than they were upon the previous occasion, and therefore were able to form a better idea of how it was produced.

"It's a horn," cried Tom Davis, as he rushed towards the front of the house—"it's a horn, or a trumpet, or something of that kind. What on earth does it mean?"

His movement was immediately followed by the rest, and in an incredibly short space of time the kitchen was vacated.

"Be careful how you show yourselves," cried Tom, who, even in this moment of excitement, had not forgotten his caution.

The highwaymen shrank back.

"You have a look first, Tom," they cried, "and let us know what it is."

Opening the door, he looked out.

But at this moment there came another blast, louder and more discordant than the former ones.

Then a cracked, wheezy voice was heard to say:

"Most important—important—important!"

Then followed another blast.

"It is a man," cried Tom Davis—"an old man with a long, battered tin horn. What on earth does he mean by kicking up all that uproar?"

"Here you have it, good people," continued the same strange voice—"here you have it; all the particulars from the beginning to the end, and most extraordinary they are. Here you have 'em—here you have 'em, and the price no more than a penny!"

He blew the horn again.

"I can't make it out," cried Tom Davis; "he is a most extraordinary-looking individual, and he is carrying a packet of papers in his hand; they must be about some important event that has just occurred."

"Get him inside," suggested Claude Duval, "and give him something to drink; that will stop his noise."

Before this advice could be acted upon, all heard distinctly the following words.

Strive as they would, not one could move until the man paused to blow his horn, which he made a point of doing at every full stop in his discourse.

"Here you have it," he cried, "the important and unparalleled details of the capture of the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, who surrendered himself prisoner yesterday, and now lies in the prison of Newgate awaiting the order for his execution; and only one penny."

The sound of the tin horn drowned the stifled shriek that burst from the lips of Maud, and without another sound she sank perfectly insensible.

Mrs. Davis and Ellen at once gave her their whole attention, leaving the highwaymen to themselves.

"Just what I feared," was Claude Duval's comment.

"We all guessed it," said Tom King, "only we did not want to say a word about it before Maud. Let us get that rascal in and get all the details we can from him."

"All right," said Tom Davis. "Just step on one side and leave it to me. On no account permit yourselves to be seen, because it is very likely he has been furnished with a description of all."

Upon this caution the highwaymen all withdrew, and Tom Davis going to the front of the inn, saw that the man had moved a little way.

But he bawled after him, and the man, turning round, hastened towards the inn at full speed.

He detached a paper from his bundle, evidently expecting that Tom Davis was about to be a purchaser.

"What's that you are saying?" he asked.

"It's about Dick Turpin, the highwayman," was the reply, given in a more natural tone of voice; "he was captured yesterday and taken to Newgate."

"Was he indeed? Well, come in and have a draught of ale, and let us know all the particulars. I'll have one of your papers as well, for, though I'm no scholar myself, there may be others who would like to read it."

"All right my friend," said the itinerant newsvendor. "I'll tell you all the particulars, and that'll save you the trouble of reading."

"Come, then—come in."

The man willingly followed Davis into the kitchen, where he sat down.

A jug of ale that one would think would take him some time to drink was placed before him.

Then Tom eagerly questioned him for information.

"Well, you see," replied the man, "it happened in this wise: Dick Turpin was overtaken and captured by a party of huntsmen, and now, as I have told you, is a prisoner in Newgate."

"And so he ought to be," said Tom Davis. "I have been expecting to hear this for a long time, and I am only afraid the news is too good to be true."

"Well, and so am I, and that's a fact. You see, these printers they get hold of any lie or idle tale and print it;

they get an ounce of fact and plaster it over with a pound of lies at once."

"You have had some experience that way, then?"

"I have, I believe you; but that's neither here nor there."

Tom Davis began to breathe a little more freely.

"Well, then," he exclaimed, "you know positively of your own knowledge that Dick Turpin is really inside Newgate at the present time?"

"No, that I don't. All I can say is what is printed on this paper, which is just to the effect that I have told you. At any rate, it seems there was a thousand pounds reward offered for his apprehension, though I don't know who is to get it."

"Well, I only hope it's all true," said Tom Davis, bending his face down over the bill, "for ever since these highwaymen have been on the road we have done no trade at all; people are afraid to travel, and never go anywhere if they can help it."

"Not only that," returned the news vendor, "but I have heard something else, though, of course, I don't know how true it may be."

"What is it?"

"Why, all the inn-keepers round the country are grumbling fearfully at the badness of trade. No one will stop there even for half an hour; they just have a drink at the door and are off again. And what should you think is the reason?"

"I have really no idea."

"Well, then, there's a report set abroad that Dick Turpin and his highwaymen have got a roadside public-house of their own, and that someone deep in their confidence keeps it. Where this inn is I believe no one can tell at present, but it is said if anyone should enter it they never are seen to come out again alive."

Tom Davis gave a great start, and exclaimed in well-simulated surprise, dashing his fist violently on the table while he spoke:

"That accounts for it—that accounts for it. I wondered what this dropping off in trade meant. Why, do you know it is the greatest rarity for me to catch sight of any one now-a-days? But it was not so—it was not so."

"That's the cause," said the news vendor, as he drank the last drop of ale; "you know the reason now, and depend upon it there's some foundation, in fact, for what I have just told you."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Davis.

"Well," said the man, "I will be off. I thought this would turn out a better job than it has at present; the papers don't move off at all briskly; somehow no one believes it."

"I can scarcely bring my mind to believe it," said Tom Davis; "but the day is young yet—you have plenty of time before you. Will you stop and have another jug of ale?"

"No, not now; many thanks to you—not now; but if I am by this way again you may depend I shall call."

"Do so—do so."

The man rose, carefully picking up his long tin horn and his bundle of papers, and then sallied forth.

Tom Davis accompanied him to the front door of the inn, where a few parting words were exchanged.

Then he stood upon the door-step watching him until he got out of sight.

Now that there was no one to observe it, Tom Davis's countenance underwent a very great and striking alteration.

It was easy to tell that the intelligence that had just been imparted to him filled him with very great anxiety.

"Dick in Newgate," he muttered as he turned away. "I fear there is no room left to doubt it. However, I will hear what the others say."

Returning to the kitchen, he found that the three highwaymen were fully as anxious as himself.

The bill that had been left upon the table had been carefully perused.

It gave very few details, and many of them, as the highwaymen were perfectly certain, were quite incorrect.

It stated that Dick Turpin's famous mare, Black Bess, was in the hands of the police officers.

This was palpably false, for Black Bess was at that moment in the stable.

Yet from this circumstance they managed to extract some amount of confidence and consolation.

"If they are wrong about Black Bess," said Tom, "why may they not be wrong about her rider? For my part I can scarcely believe that Dick is in Newgate, although I see it in print before my eyes, and although he has failed to return at the time appointed. The question is, how are we to ascertain it without incurring danger ourselves?"

"Yes, that's the point we have to discuss," cried Tom Davis, "and the sooner we begin it the better. And not only that—did you hear what the man said about the roadside-inn? The secret passage has not been constructed one hour too soon, for, as I dreaded, the police officers have got wind of our nice little scheme. I knew very well things were going on by far too pleasant and comfortable to last."

CHAPTER DCCCXLVII.

TOM DAVIS SETS OUT FOR LONDON IN ORDER TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER DICK TURPIN IS REALLY A PRISONER OR NOT.

"YES," said Sixteen-String Jack. "We all heard him, and, at any other time than the present, should feel a very great deal more uneasiness than we do now. As it is, however, a consideration of the captain's position outweighs everything."

"You are right there," rejoined Tom King. "If what we have heard is true, no exertions and sacrifices must be wanting on our part to effect his release. You all know very well that if any of us happened to be in his position, he would be the first one to attempt a rescue."

"He would—he would," said Claude Duval, "and I will willingly do all I can."

"It seems to me," said Tom Davis, "that almost the first thing to be done is to ascertain, somehow or other, whether the facts set down in this bill are true."

"Yes, that's it," said Sixteen-String Jack. "But how is it to be done?"

"If you will allow me," said Tom Davis, "to make a suggestion—"

"Oh, certainly!"

"It is, then, that you allow me to set off without delay to London. When there, I shall be able to ascertain for certain."

"A good suggestion," said Tom King, "only I can improve it."

"In what way?"

"By allowing me to go instead of yourself."

But Tom Davis only shook his head.

"No, no!" he exclaimed—"I am quite certain that would never answer at all! You would run a thousand risks of detection, whereas I should run none. If seen by anyone, it would only be thought that I was about my regular business."

"Yes, yes!" cried Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval. "Tom Davis is perfectly in the right. He ought to go, and let him start at once, and then he will be back the sooner."

"I am ready now."

"No doubt you are," said Claude. "And don't stay a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. When you have found out whether Dick is in Newgate or not, hasten back at the top of your speed."

"I will, depend upon it!"

"Very well, then—be off!"

"In a moment. Where's Maud?"

They looked around, and just at that moment Ellen entered.

The question was repeated.

"She is still senseless," was the answer. "We are quite alarmed."

"You must try to bring her to," said Davis, "and as soon as she is conscious let her know that I have gone to London, and say I hope to return with good intelligence."

"How long shall you be absent?" Ellen asked.

"That is impossible for me to say; but no longer than I can help. While I am away," he continued, addressing the highwaymen, "do you keep carefully out of sight, and if the officers pay a visit in my absence, don't hesitate to avail yourselves of the secret passage."

"We will not; but if Dick should unfortunately be the inmate of a Newgate cell, the officers will all be clustered round about there like so many bees."

"Yes; and that reminds me that I scarcely ought to start off to London without some arrangement being made."

"What kind of arrangement do you mean?"

"Why, suppose that it turns out that Dick is really a prisoner—mind, I say this only in case it turns out so—it is best to be prepared for the worst, is it not?"

"Quite. But what then?"

"Why, had we better not come to some determination as to our proceedings?"

"I don't see how it is possible."

"Nor I, exactly; but my present idea is to run the risk of calling upon old Matthew Gale, in Drury Lane."

"Oh, ah! That's a good thought!"

"He is a long-headed fellow, you know, and takes an especial delight in outwitting the police officers. Ten to one he could give us some valuable suggestions, and render us some still more valuable assistance."

"Beyond a doubt he could. I am glad you thought of it. Call there by all means."

"Well, then, I think that is about all that can be done at present. I will put one of the horses in the light cart, and drive off this moment."

The highwaymen urged him to leave.

But just as he was passing through the doorway, Maud descended the staircase.

There was an air of great wildness and frenzy in her manner, and, seizing Tom Davis by the breast of his coat, she exclaimed:

"Tell me—tell me—let it come from your lips, and I shall be satisfied—is what I hear the truth?—is Dick really a prisoner?"

"I have no means of answering," said Tom Davis, "I have heard as much, and am now about to set off to London to ascertain whether the report is true or false. I hope the latter, and, if possible, I will return in a few hours, bringing Turpin with me."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "That hope is a vain one! If the officers have really captured him, such close watch and guard will be set upon all his movements that escape will be totally impossible. They are already exasperated beyond measure. Alas—alas! I feel that his doom is sealed."

She wept bitterly and violently—so violently that Tom Davis grew alarmed.

"Calm yourself," he exclaimed—"pray calm yourself for a little while until I return! Then will be the time to give way to grief, when you feel there is no longer room left for hope."

"I know it now," she said—"I have a presentiment in my mind which I cannot mistake! I feel as certain as I should do if I had witnessed all with my own eyes, that Dick is at this moment languishing a prisoner in one of those gloomy cells. He will be watched and guarded—no movement, however slight, will pass unnoticed—access will be denied to him. Tell me, then, how you can hope to effect his escape!"

"We cannot look forward to so much as that at present," was his answer. "We have first to satisfy ourselves he is a prisoner, and I can assure you I by no means feel sure of it, nor did the man who sold the paper."

Maud released him from her grasp, and, stepping back a pace or two, clasped her hands together.

Then, fixing her eyes upon his countenance, she said: "Is that really and truly so, or do you simply say it out of some motive of mistaken kindness? If so, let me beg of you to recall your words; otherwise the disappointment will be bitter—more bitter than I can bear!"

"It is not a false hope," said Tom. "The man was not certain, and that's why I am setting out to ascertain."

"Then go," she exclaimed—"go at once! I will not detain you a moment longer, and while you are absent I will try to be as calm and hopeful as I can! I shall long for your return—I shall count every second, so, in pity to me, be no longer than you can help."

Tom Davis promised faithfully, and, glad to leave her in such a mood as this, hastened at once towards the stables.

His preparations were quickly made.

The horse was harnessed to the cart, and, after one

more farewell and a reiteration of his injunctions, he rode off.

The time passed most wearily and anxiously.

The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, until the meridian was past.

Hours and hours elapsed, and yet there were no signs of Tom Davis's return.

What could have detained him, they were at a loss to imagine; but, from his long absence, they drew most unfavourable auguries.

Had the report been a false one, it could have been ascertained immediately, and he would have been back long and long ago.

Such being the case, the highwaymen resigned themselves to the worst, and already began to speculate in their own minds as to which would be the likeliest means by which they could obtain the captain's liberation.

Maud's calmness and hopefulness departed also, and so great did her agitation become, and so vehement was her grief, that the worst consequences were apprehended.

Still Tom Davis came not, and it was not until the long shadows of evening were beginning to creep over the landscape that the distant rattle of his light cart could be heard.

Burning with curiosity, the highwaymen watched its approach.

In a few moments it came in sight, and then Tom Davis drew up with a dash in front of the inn, with a look of unusual importance and seriousness upon his countenance.

CHAPTER DCCCXLVIII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND THE HUNTSMEN.

HAVING now brought events up to this point, we feel that we shall be able to devote the whole of our attention to the very peculiar and critical position in which Dick Turpin is placed.

It will be remembered that his words were that he would surrender freely and without any resistance to Sir George.

No sooner were these words spoken than the baronet stretched out his hand and placed it on the highwayman's shoulder, and as he did so he exclaimed:

"Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner!"

Dick only bowed.

Sir Marmaduke, frantic with rage, seized Turpin also.

"Bind the villain," he cried; "secure him! Pinion him so that he cannot escape! I command you all to obey me in this matter!"

Dick Turpin shook off the grasp of Sir Marmaduke rather roughly.

"You forget," he said. "I did not yield myself a prisoner to you, but to this gentleman, and I warn you that if you interfere you will find that you have a very dangerous customer to meddle with."

Fairly white with passion, Sir Marmaduke again carried his hand to his sword.

"I wish you would cross weapons with me," shouted Dick, as he observed the movement; "but I know your nature too well to think for a moment that you would ever have the courage to do so."

This remark stung him to the quick—so much so that he half drew his sword from its sheath.

But dashing it back again, he said:

"I am a fool to bandy words thus with a robber, and I deserve all the abuse I get."

"Excuse me," said Sir George, "but my opinion is that the abuse is on your part."

"And my opinion is," retorted Sir Marmaduke, "that if you had the opportunity you would allow this man to regain his liberty."

"You may be right and you may be wrong," was the calm reply.

"Well, then," cried Sir Marmaduke, "let me ask you what it is you intend to do with your prisoner?"

"Do with him? I have not the least idea. I don't want him. I would much rather look after my own business."

"Then hand him over to me."

"But he objects."

"Yes, decidedly," said Dick.

"Well, then, you must take him to Newgate yourself, Sir George."

"I'll be d—d if I do."

"But I say you shall," shrieked Sir Marmaduke. "Don't think I am blind to the partiality you have all shown for him!—I take it as the greatest of all insults to myself. But you will repent of it ere long, mark my words if you don't!"

The huntsmen smiled rather derisively, and, to tell the truth, they were by no means sorry that a pretext had arisen for turning away altogether from their arrogant, pragmatical neighbour.

Now they had very good cause for refusing to meet him anywhere, and they resolved that whenever another meeting took place he should not be one of their number.

"Come on," cried Sir Marmaduke; "if you choose to take him prisoner you must hand him over to the officers of justice. Come on."

"No. I would much sooner remain here and simply keep guard over him. I am not so fond of police officers as to be ambitious of emulating their doings."

"It is such men as you who bring their authority into disrepute," retorted Sir Marmaduke; "but a proper representation of this affair shall be sent to the proper quarters, and you will then see what will be the result of it."

"So we shall if we live long enough," returned Sir George; "but if I knew there was anyone with such vindictive feelings as Dick Turpin has against you, I should feel doubtful about existing much longer."

It was easy to see that, in spite of his boast and swagger, this idea alarmed the baronet greatly, for he again turned very white.

"If you would keep guard over him," he said, at length, after a pause, "I would quickly put an end to the matter by riding off immediately, and returning with a body of police officers."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"Simply because I know that as soon as I turned my back you would allow that rascal an opportunity to escape, and he would avail himself of it in a moment. Ah!" he cried, in quite a changed voice, and throwing up his arms with great exultation. "Now we shall soon see the aspect of affairs altered. How fortunate, to be sure?"

Raising his voice to its highest pitch, he bawled:

"Robert—Robert! This way quick! D—n you—make haste!"

The others immediately turned their heads, and saw at no great distance the form of a man dressed in the attire of a gamekeeper.

He was evidently well known by Sir Marmaduke.

On hearing himself called thus, Robert came running forward, gun in hand, at great speed.

"Yes, your worship," he replied, as soon as he recognised Sir Marmaduke—"yes, your worship? What is it you might be pleased to want?"

The baronet smiled triumphantly.

"You will take this horse," he said, "mount it, and ride off with all speed to the nearest place where you can make sure of meeting with a body of police officers. Bring as many as you can, and tell them that we have Dick Turpin here a prisoner."

The gamekeeper looked round him in great surprise.

But Sir Marmaduke checked him abruptly.

"Here's the horse!" he cried, "Mount—ride off at full speed, if you break the horse's neck and your own as well! Every moment is of consequence!"

Robert dared not refuse—he knew that, in spite of the confusion of his intellects.

So, without another word, he scrambled into the saddle, and off he went.

Sir Marmaduke watched him depart with eager interest, and so did Dick Turpin.

Through the latter's brain many strange thoughts were passing with wonderful rapidity.

He took, in the first place, a rapid review of his position.

If he waited until this gamekeeper returned with a body of police officers, his chances of escape would be remote indeed.

On the other hand, among all the huntsmen he believed there was only one, and that was Sir Marmaduke, who

would oppose his departure if he made a bold run to escape.

This course he would most certainly have adopted but for one consideration, and that was the effect it would be likely to have upon Sir George and the others, who had shown themselves inclined to be his friends.

He had a tolerable idea of the amount of power such a man as the chief magistrate of the county would possess, and he was also aware that the punishment for aiding and abetting a felon was severe, and would be inflicted upon Sir George and his companions just the same as upon anyone else.

Now Dick was far too generous in his nature to attempt, by running away, to make his escape, and so draw down upon the huntsmen the consequences of this act.

Moreover, he felt inclined to trust in Sir George, although he had not much faith in human nature generally.

Yet that gentleman, by his manner, seemed to imply that it would be wise for him to resign himself for awhile to his fate.

At last this was what Dick resolved to do—not only on this consideration, but because he all at once recollected a little circumstance that in the excitement of the moment had quite slipped his recollection.

This was the locket that had been given him by the lady who was surrounded by so many mysteries, not one of which Dick had been able to pierce.

From the moment he had received it until the present he had never attempted to make the least examination of it.

Yet as the recollection of all the circumstances came into his mind, a great degree of confidence sprang up in his breast.

"Surely," he thought, "she would never have been so anxious to make me this present if she had not been fully aware of its efficacy. Yes, yes—I feel that I can trust her, and that this locket will be the means of extricating me from my present perilous predicament. She told me not to make use of it until in the utmost extremity of danger. I will not, for if I can see any opportunity of escape without having resort to it, I shall most certainly avail myself of the chance. Yes, yes—that is my determination. And now for a little while I will content myself with being merely a calm spectator of events."

Having come to this conclusion, Dick grew quite calm, and again folding his arms, looked around him with an easy, self-satisfied air, which elicited the utmost admiration of the huntsmen.

Suddenly a loud and joyous cry burst from the lips of Sir Marmaduke, and all turned their eyes in the direction in which he was gazing.

They then perceived, at several fields' distance, a large body of police officers, whose large-buttoned scarlet waistcoats made them conspicuous objects.

They were all mounted on strong, powerful steeds.

Sir Marmaduke waved his hat, and they took off theirs in response, and accelerated their speed.

"Here they come," he cried, in the utmost exultation—"here they come! Now we shall see a little change in the posture of affairs! He looks very bold, and has carried things off with a high hand up to the present; but it has been because he has not been in danger. I have come face to face with criminals before to-day, and I'll warrant you that no sooner does he find himself surrounded by officers, than this loud-crowling cock will show the white feather! Aha!"

CHAPTER DCCCXLIX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HANDCUFFED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND THE JOURNEY TO NEWGATE IS COMMENCED.

DICK TURPIN just glanced at the approaching police officers for a moment, then, turning round, addressed Sir George.

"Of course you are aware," he said, "that there is a reward of a thousand pounds offered for whoever shall apprehend me. I believe that is how the bills run—apprehend merely. It is not necessary that my conviction or execution should follow to entitle you to that amount. Now it would gall me exceedingly if I thought those

lubberly fellows who are coming galloping up yonder were to share among them such a nice little amount as this, and therefore, Sir George, I have to beg that you will claim it yourself—you are heartily welcome to it."

The huntsmen were in no small degree amazed to hear Turpin talking in this civil fashion upon such a topic, and they exchanged glances with each other accordingly.

Sir George burst out into a laugh, as he said:

"Well, of course, a thousand pounds is an amount to any man, no matter how rich he may be, and as you say, I think it would be very unjust to allow those officers to share it, though, if it comes to that, you surrendered yourself to me—I did not capture you."

"It's all the same thing," returned Turpin, "if you like you can lay hands upon me and capture me now."

Sir George paused a moment as though some fresh thought had struck him.

Then, with a twinkle in his pleasant gray eyes, and a smile upon his lips, he advanced, and held Turpin firmly by the wrist and the back of his coat collar.

"Now," he said, "you are my prisoner."

Sir Marmaduke scarcely knew what to make of all this—he was still foaming and fretting with rage.

But he consoled himself with watching the approach of the police officers and with thinking that now they had arrived he should be able to turn the tables to some extent upon his companions.

The officers were some who had been fetched from the nearest market town to where they happened to be—strong, stout-built fellows, as ignorant as gateposts, and possessing none of those qualities of courage and skill necessary to the keeping of a man like Dick Turpin a prisoner.

Dick noted all this with an air of satisfaction.

"After all," he thought, "I shall not have to trouble myself about the locket—I shall have plenty of opportunities to get free from them."

On their arrival these officers greeted Sir Marmaduke with an immense amount of respect.

Indeed, it seemed as though they would never have left off bowing to him.

"Now, my men," he said, "that is Dick Turpin. Seize him, bind him securely, and convey him with all speed to Newgate! You know the reward that is offered for his apprehension."

"Yes," said Sir George. "But I wish to remind you all that he is my prisoner, and mine only, and I shall not relinquish the reward in favour of anyone! Officers, I call upon you, as a mere matter of duty, to escort this man to Newgate."

Hearing this, the officers looked greatly mortified and crestfallen.

However, they turned to Sir Marmaduke for consolation.

"We'll see all about that," he said. "Just hark at this, my men: It is true Sir George may claim the reward, as he says, though I don't think he will; at any rate, if he does, I will use my influence to have the reward paid to you as well; or, if I cannot do that, why, I will pay you the thousand pounds out of my own private pocket as soon as you assure me he is safe within the prison of Newgate."

"Done, sir," said the one in command—"done, sir, and many thanks to you! I'll warrant when we once take charge of him that he doesn't escape."

While he spoke, the officer produced a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

"There," he said, "these are the little things I am going to treat you with. I have heard a great deal about your cleverness, Mr. Turpin, but I want to know whether you can wriggle yourself out of these?"

Dick looked at Sir George, as much as to say:

"Save me from the indignity and pain of having those handcuffs put on me."

But Sir George only nodded at him and smiled reassuringly.

The officer with the handcuffs made a great show of bluster and violence.

"You need not make so much fuss," cried Sir George. "Just set about your duty quickly, and remember that I am keeping an eye upon your proceedings; the man offers you no resistance, so perform your duty peacefully."

Thus rebuked, the officer checked himself in some

very biting remark that he was going to make, and silently put on the handcuffs.

"As he is my prisoner," said Sir George, "I shall accompany you with him wherever you may go."

"And so shall I," cried Sir Marmaduke. "I can tell what you mean, well enough; but you will find I shall have an eye on all your movements—I shall not leave Dick Turpin until I find him safely a prisoner."

"Well, I can't prevent you from doing that, nor do I wish to do so," answered Sir George. "I only spoke for myself, because I can assure you, that the thousand pounds will come in particularly useful just at the present time."

No further remark was made, and Dick Turpin was requested to mount one of the officer's horses.

He complied, and had not the bridle been grasped by several of the officers, he would then, although his arms were secured behind him, have made a bold rush to escape.

This was at present impossible, and wisely he resolved not to expend his strength or run any risk in making an abortive attempt at escape.

When he did try, it should be when he could feel almost certain of success.

A rope was next produced, and tied round his leg just above the ankle.

This rope was then passed underneath the horse's belly, and secured tightly to his other leg.

"Now, then," cried the chief officer, "one of you mount behind him, and clasp him tightly round the waist with your arms. Two others shall hold the reins and lead the horse along."

Sir Marmaduke was highly delighted with this expedient, and complimented the officer upon his cleverness.

While Dick Turpin was so guarded he must of necessity be safe.

The other huntsmen seemed half inclined to join in the procession, for such it seemed when all was in readiness for a start, and a few of them actually followed for a short distance.

One by one, however, they dropped off, until only Sir Marmaduke and Sir George were left.

The distance to London was considerable.

But neither cared for that.

Sir Marmaduke was still burning with revenge, not only because of Turpin's attempt to rob him, but also because his conduct had been so exposed, and because so much ill feeling had been shown towards him.

There was no fear but that this feeling would carry him much further than to London.

On the other hand, Sir George was actuated by widely different feelings.

It was his intention, if possible, to enable Turpin to make his escape, for he was a man who always admired boldness, no matter where or with whom he found it.

Dick Turpin he had somehow taken a kind of liking to from the first moment that he saw him, and he was determined that no effort should be wanting on his part to procure his release.

Of course he would have to be exceedingly careful while Sir Marmaduke's eyes were upon him, for if that individual could bring the charge of aiding Dick to escape home to him, he would certainly do so, and press for a severe punishment.

Sir George, in his light-heartedness, did not care a whit.

Already in his own mind he had resolved what he should do with the thousand pounds' reward which, be it understood, he fully intended to claim.

The officers and Sir Marmaduke were all in high spirits, and they trotted along the high-road towards the metropolis at a very respectable rate.

Many persons they met turned to look at such a strange cavalcade.

But no explanation was given as to the meaning of it.

But it was noticed first of all by Dick Turpin that the clouds were beginning to gather up in a pack away upon the horizon.

He had not led an out-door life so long as to be ignorant of the portents of the weather, and from what he saw he felt perfectly certain that ere long there would be a terrific storm.

From having nothing else to occupy his thoughts and attention, he amused himself by watching the progress

of the clouds, and in a shorter space of time than he had expected he found that they had crept over the whole firmament, leaving not one single patch of blue to be seen.

The rain then began to fall—not gently at first, but it poured down at once with its full force, with such effect that everyone in the party was in an instant drenched to the skin.

Sir Marmaduke especially felt very uncomfortable for the rain was driven directly in his face, and struck against it with pelting force, each rain-drop seeming almost like a hailstone.

Then the hollow mutterings of thunder could be heard, followed shortly by a feeble flash of lightning.

All this only served to give an indication of what was to come, and the least experienced of the party knew well enough that a storm of unusual violence was going to break forth.

Sir Marmaduke, keeping the rain out of his eyes as well as he could, looked anxiously around him, hoping to perceive some place of shelter.

CHAPTER DCCCL.

THE OFFICERS STOP FOR SHELTER AT THE BAG OF NAILS INN, AND DICK TURPIN RESOLVES TO AVAIL HIMSELF OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE.

THE others looked around them too, with the same intent, but at present there was not a human habitation, or even a barn, within sight; and yet there might have been one at no great distance, for such was the velocity with which the rain reached the earth, that it caused a kind of mist to arise, which effectually prevented them from seeing any other objects than those which were close at hand.

The officers took their ducking rather complacently, for they were used to exposure to the weather. Not so Sir Marmaduke and Sir George, however. They gave vent to their annoyance in very audible terms.

As for Turpin, he said nothing.

His mind was occupied just then in devising some means by which he could release himself from his present unenviable position.

But as yet he could see no opening, and all he could do was to hold himself in readiness to take advantage of any accident that might take place.

All at once Sir Marmaduke, still peering through the mist and rain, perceived before him the dim outlines of a building of some kind.

"What place is that?" he asked, addressing himself to one of the police officers, and pointing in advance while he spoke.

"That, sir," was the answer, "is the Bag of Nails Inn, or I am much mistaken. It is kept by one Timothy Goodall—a rare fellow, I can assure your honour, and his house affords the best possible accommodation for man and beast."

"Then, in the devil's name, push on!" shouted Sir Marmaduke, impatiently, for he had tried in vain to stem the officer's loquacity.

"Will you stop there, sir?"

"Yes, certainly, till this storm be past. Besides, you cannot perform the journey to London without halting somewhere."

"True enough, sir. The horses will be glad of something to eat, and a rub down."

"Then just tell those fellows in front to push on at a little better speed, will you?"

The officer rode forward to obey this injunction, and Sir Marmaduke bent his head before the storm, the violence of which had now very much increased.

Dick Turpin overheard this conversation with secret pleasure.

He was quite delighted to think the storm had broken forth, although by it he had suffered some passing inconvenience.

A stoppage at an inn would be, he felt certain, an event that offered him a favourable chance of making his escape.

The distance to the Bag of Nails was only trifling, so that, as the officers increased their speed, it was quickly reached.

As they drew up in front of the horse-trough, they

perceived the landlord standing at one of the low windows, looking out.

He witnessed the stopping of so many persons before his door with great surprise.

"This will be quite a windfall for old Timothy," said the loquacious officer. "He won't quarrel with the storm, I'll be bound, for, except by chance like this, he does no sort of trade at all."

This piece of gratuitous information was silently received, the fact being that each and all were anxiously endeavouring to get beneath the roof of the inn as quickly as possible.

The landlord appeared at the front door.

"Jim—Jim!" he cried. "Where on earth is the lazy rascal? Jim—Jim, I say!"

"Here I be, master. What's the row?"

A very peculiar-looking individual made his appearance from the rear of the inn. His hair was filled with bits of straw, as though he had just been lying down in the loft.

Without another word he ran forward and took charge of the horses.

"See to them well," said the commanding officer.

"And especially to this one of mine," added Sir George.

Sir Marmaduke said nothing. He was too busy occupied in watching Dick Turpin's every movement to think about anything else.

With great care and caution the officers dismounted their prisoner.

Dick was careful not to offer the least show of resistance, for he hoped, by submitting quietly to everything, to throw the officers off their guard.

While they continued to watch him as vigilantly as they had done up to the present moment, it was ridiculous to think of making an escape.

The officers seemed by their looks to be a good deal surprised at his demeanour.

They expected to have a vast deal of trouble, and when they found Dick submit so easily, they really felt quite injured and disappointed.

Densely surrounded by his foes, Turpin was hurried into the inn.

As they crossed the threshold, Dick's reflection was:

"Now, if old Matthew kept this inn, what a difference it would make to be sure! He would get me out of this scrape in no time. However, it is no good to think about that, I must rely upon my own resources."

From this it will be seen that Dick treated his present dangerous position very lightly.

The fact was, the more he thought upon the subject the more reliance he was disposed to place in the lock that had been presented to him.

It would have been an additional satisfaction to him if he could have opened it and just taken one peep, but that was quite impossible.

In fact, we may go the length of saying that, but for one circumstance, he would have felt more careless still. But he thought of Maud and his comrades.

He knew how much grief and alarm the first would suffer when she had heard what had taken place; and with regard to his comrades, he feared, not unnaturally, in their strong desire to rescue him, that they would run themselves into great and unnecessary danger.

"No," he muttered, "I won't trust to the locket if I can possibly escape, if only for their sakes. The sooner I am back among them the better. Yes—yes, I will escape."

When Dick Turpin once made up his mind to a thing it was strange indeed if he did not accomplish it. Nothing short of absolute impossibility would have stayed him.

Upon entering the Bag of Nails Inn, the police officers at once betook themselves to the largest room in the place. They were pleased to find that it was vacant.

A huge fire, however, was burning on the spacious hearth, and they looked at it pleasantly, as it promised to dry their soaked apparel rapidly and effectually.

Before attending to this or anything else, their first care was to see that their prisoner was quite secure.

With this view a strong chair was called for, which was placed beside the fire.

In this Dick Turpin was seated, with his hands still secured behind him.

A rope was produced, and then wound round him in



THE ENTRY OF DICK TURPIN INTO NEWGATE.

such a way, that he could not possibly move without carrying it with him.

This made his hopes of escape sink down to zero.

If the officers chose to remain in the same room, and, beyond a doubt, this is what they intended to do, he could not by any possibility get away unseen.

Sir Marmaduke superintended all these arrangements, and when they were completed, the chief officer said:

"Beg pardon, your worship, but don't you think we had better order a bit of a snack while we are drying our clothes. We shall not be able to leave until the storm gives over a little, and it does not promise to do that yet awhile."

"Oh, yee—yes, anything you like; but mind your prisoner is safely kept, that's all."

"Oh, leave us to see to that, your worship."

A very substantial meal was then called for, and by the No. 175—BLACK DICK.

time it was ready, they had managed to dry their garments.

A very savoury odour arose from the various viands, and reminded Dick that a long time had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

He waited a short time to see whether anything would be offered to him; but finding the officers began their feast without paying the slightest attention to him, he said:

"Don't you intend me to have anything until you get me to Newgate? Or if Sir Marmaduke grudges the expense, I will pay my own share, and yours as well!"

Sir Marmaduke frowned, and growled out an inarticulate reply.

"Certainly," said Sir George, "you shall have what you wish—I will see to that."

"But," said the chief officer, "how can he eat?"

"Just take off these handcuffs and I'll soon show you," replied Turpin.

The chief officer paused, and looked irresolutely at Sir Marmaduke, who, being a magistrate, was of course expected to have the supreme command.

"Yes," added Sir George, "take off his handcuffs: there will be no difficulty then."

"Don't you wish you may get it," replied Sir Marmaduke. "No, no, my fine fellow, I have heard too much of your narrow escapes and your cleverness to think of allowing you to be any less safe than you are now."

"But," added Sir George, "what difference can taking off the handcuffs make? You can sit here, all of you, with your eyes upon him, and could prevent him untying the ropes, and if he did not do that, wherever he went he would have to carry the chair with him."

There was a silence.

"I insist that this shall be done!" said Sir George. "You have no right, and duty does not permit you, to refuse this man something to eat."

The chief officer ventured to nudge Sir George, and he whispered:

"I think it might be as well, your worship, to let him have his own way; we can keep a good eye upon him and see he does not untie the ropes; it will be the way to avoid all bother."

Sir Marmaduke also thought so, and therefore Dick was for a time released.

But before removing the handcuffs they took good care to see that all the ropes were perfectly secure.

Now, the reader may imagine that it was not altogether from the want of food that Dick made this request, though a long time had elapsed since he had tasted anything, and he felt faint in consequence.

A good meal would, he knew, endow him with fresh strength, and place him in a better position to make an effort for freedom.

A plate was brought and placed upon his knees.

But it was a difficult matter to eat, owing to the manner in which the rope was bound round his body and secured to the back of the chair.

Dick Turpin fixed his attention so entirely upon what he was about, that the officers in a short time grew tired of watching him, and looked after what they had on their own plates.

CHAPTER DCCCL.

IN WHICH THE POLICE OFFICERS CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY TO LONDON WITH THEIR CAPTIVE.

As for Sir George, he was, to tell the truth, very much astonished to find a man in so perilous a position as Dick Turpin eating a meal with so much relish and coolness.

He certainly appeared to be more at ease than any other one of the party.

But although it could scarcely have been gathered from his countenance, Dick's thoughts were very busy indeed.

He began to see pretty plainly that for the present his attempt to escape must be abandoned.

The least movement of his towards untying one of the many knots by which he was secured to the chair could not fail to be seen by some of the officers, and then they would all be immediately upon him.

His ankles were also tied very tightly, and he moved his legs about a little in the hope of being able to loosen the cord.

But this he found was impossible.

Whether or not he would have another opportunity allowed him before he arrived at Newgate was a very doubtful matter.

He was inclined to think that when the storm cleared off, the officers would make a start, and by travelling gently, endeavour to reach London before nightfall, and without making another halt on the way.

If this was the case, what was the next best use he could make of his hands while they were at liberty? for he knew his captors well enough to feel certain that as soon as his meal was over the handcuffs would be replaced.

His thoughts were still running upon the lockets which he knew he had secure in one of the pockets of his waist-

coat. It would have been a great source of confidence to him could he but have opened it and glanced at what it contained.

This was not to be thought of, for if the officers saw it they would seize it immediately, and as a matter of course he would never catch sight of it again.

This brought to his mind the fact that, should he be carried as far as Newgate, the officials, when searching in his pockets, would be sure to find it, and he would be deprived of it.

Then how and in what way could he conceal it so as to keep it safely?

This was a point upon which he bestowed a great amount of consideration.

The only plan that he could think of that seemed at all feasible was to watch an opportunity to take it secretly out of his pocket and convey it to his mouth, keeping it there until alone in his cell.

He had arrived at this conclusion by the time he had finished his breakfast, if so substantial a meal could be so called.

And without further hesitation he put his thumb and finger into his waistcoat pocket at a moment when he believed not one of the officers had his eyes fixed upon him.

The locket was there, and he drew it forth eagerly, holding it between the tips of his fingers.

Its size was small, and it was evidently composed of the purest gold.

The inclination then came over him to open it and take a glance at its contents, for had it not been for the possession of this, Dick would have tried harder for freedom, even if he lost his life in the attempt.

But he was putting great faith in the word of a stranger, and it might turn out after all that the trinket would not prove efficacious.

Just then, however, the storm passed over, and the sun broke forth, sending a few watery beams into the apartment.

As soon as he caught sight of the sun's rays, Sir Marmaduke rose to his feet, crying:

"Now, my lads, the weather is fair again, and we have stopped here quite long enough. Secure your prisoner again, and have the horses brought round to the front, for the sooner we reach London the better I shall be pleased."

His word was law, for it was to him, it must be recollected, that the officers looked for the thousand pounds' reward, provided the amount offered by Government should be obtained by Sir George.

The officers, however, were one and all in excellent humour. What with the capital repast they had had, and the pleasant prospect there was before them, who could wonder that their minds should be occupied by a feeling of great self-complacency?

In imagination they could see dancing before their eyes the tempting sum of one thousand pounds all ready for them, and only waiting for the moment when they should choose to put forth their hands and grasp their own share of it.

But Dick, perceiving this sudden movement on the part of the officers, took advantage of it to slip the locket into his mouth.

It was done neatly, for at the same time he pretended to wipe away a few crumbs from his lips.

Owing to the small size of the locket, he knew he should be able to retain it in his mouth and speak also without much difficulty.

The officers having despatched one of their number to see to the horses being brought round, clustered very closely round his chair, and had he deferred the execution of his project for another moment, he would unquestionably have failed.

The handcuffs were again placed upon his wrists, in spite of the objections that he raised to such a proceeding.

The police officer shut one eye knowingly, and, addressing the prisoner, said:

"Will you give me your word of honour, Dick, that if we leave you without the handcuffs you will go quietly with us to Newgate and make no attempt to escape?"

Dick's reply was of course in the negative, so the officer added:

"Then there is no help for it, my lad—the darbies must go on."

The handcuffs were fixed upon Turpin's wrists with professional dexterity.

Then the ropes were untied, and he was comparatively free.

He shook himself with an air of great satisfaction, for he was cramped from remaining so long in one position.

In a compact body the officers then moved to the front door of the inn.

Most of the horses had been brought round, so Dick was placed on one at once.

A man mounted behind him, and the same order of procession observed as before, except that, instead of two men walking by the side of the horse and holding the bridle, they cut the rein in two, so that it might be held by a mounted officer on either side, who could control the movements of the animal.

In a few moments all was ready, and Sir Marmaduke, addressing all the officers collectively, said:

"Now, my good fellows, just listen to me for a moment. You have all had a capital breakfast, your horses have every one been well taken care of; the distance to London is great, I know, but not so great as to prevent us from reaching it without another halt by the way. It won't be quite so pleasant, perhaps, but, take my word for it, it will be much better. I know there are plenty of public-houses, the landlords of which are friendly to highwaymen, and we might have the mortification of seeing our prisoner escape us. In order to guard against that, let me advise you to put up with the inconvenience of riding the whole distance without stopping."

"We will, your worship," said the chief officer—"we will; your advice is the very best that could be given, and I will see that it is followed."

"Then, as that is settled," said Sir Marmaduke, let us set forward at once."

The order was given, and the journey was commenced.

After hearing this little conversation, Dick had good reason to congratulate himself upon the course he had adopted.

Had he neglected to avail himself of the opportunity, he would probably never have had another.

Now he felt that all depended upon whether the locket possessed the virtues that had been ascribed to it.

The journey was performed at a gentle speed, so as not to distress the horses too greatly.

There was sound policy in this, for the animals were not knocked up half so quickly as they would have been had another course been adopted.

As they drew nearer and nearer to London, Sir Marmaduke grew more and more exultant.

At last he thought the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, would be safe within the walls of Newgate, and to him would be due the honour of having brought about such a desirable state of things.

Sir George, with every wish to save Dick Turpin if he could, had as yet seen no opportunity for interference.

Events had turned out differently to what he had expected, and he began to regret having taken upon himself the responsibility of advising Turpin to surrender, when perhaps he might by chance have made his escape.

Dick began to see that it was pretty certain his captors would carry him to Newgate, for instead of their vigilance abating in any degree, he believed that it increased.

But then, as we know, this was owing entirely to a personal cause.

Revenge was the dominant spirit in Sir Marmaduke's breast, and this it was that made him watch Turpin so closely, while the officers were anxious to do their best in order to obtain the reward.

A strange, gloomy feeling began to creep over Dick's heart as he got nearer and nearer to London.

He strove against the sensation, but could not banish it.

He kept thinking that there were many others as well as himself which he would like to feel more satisfied than he did at present.

And one of them was whether Black Bess had succeeded in reaching the inn in safety.

Could he but have felt perfectly certain that this was the case, it would indeed have removed a very considerable portion of the oppression at his heart.

CHAPTER DCCCLII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS AT LENGTH ARRIVE AT NEWGATE WITH THEIR PRISONER.

DICK TURPIN KNEW, however, that there was no other means by which this could be ascertained than by waiting patiently.

Yet when the procession fairly entered London streets, his breathing grew laboured and difficult, and the gloom which had already begun to spread itself over his spirits grew darker and darker.

By no means did he give way to this feeling, but it was one entirely beyond his own control.

Sir George also looked anxious and vexed, and all could tell that he was in deep thought on some subject or other.

Sir Marmaduke presented a most remarkable contrast to these two.

His face was beaming with triumph, and such was his exultation that he could scarcely restrain himself within moderate bounds.

The officers, also, were greatly overjoyed, for, having once reached London, they considered that the danger and difficulty of their task was at an end.

Surely there could be no fear of his escaping now?

So good was the speed they made, that when they arrived in the metropolis the business of the day was in full swing, and the streets were unusually full of vehicles and pedestrians.

Quickly from mouth to mouth the intelligence spread that Dick Turpin was a prisoner, and in an incredibly short space of time the officers found themselves surrounded by a mob of uncommon magnitude, shouting, yelling, and otherwise violently behaving themselves, all being animated by one desire, which was to catch sight of the notorious prisoner.

But the officers closed still more closely around Dick.

They knew him to be a popular favourite, and dreaded that the mob would make an effort to set him at liberty again.

Very likely, had there been one master spirit to direct the movements of the crowd, this would have taken place.

The only person capable of it, however, was Sir George, and personal considerations prevented him from doing so.

Therefore the mob contented themselves with yelling as before, and running so as to keep pace with the horses.

By the time the Old Bailey was reached, the thoroughfare was completely blocked up.

The officers began to grow more anxious, and Sir Marmaduke scarcely dared confess to himself the fears he had that, after all, it would be difficult to gain the interior of Newgate.

Dick looked around him, as well as he was able, at the numberless faces.

But there was not one that he could recognise.

And now being in sight of the great prison of Newgate, that gloom which we have already mentioned reached its height.

He gave one glance up at the frowning walls, and only one.

How vividly was brought back to him the time when he had made so strange and daring an escape.

Now that the ravages of the fire had been repaired, the prison looked stronger and more dismal than ever.

At a slow walk the officers urged their steeds along past the Sessions House, past the residence of the Governor, until the small, well-known doorway was reached through which the prisoners were admitted.

The great commotion in the street outside had made the man on the lock aware that some unusual event was taking place, and he was on the look-out accordingly.

Little did he imagine, however, that he was about to open the door to give entrance to Dick Turpin.

Such proved to be the case, however.

Sir Marmaduke saw the man's face through the bars at the top of the door, and shouted loudly to him to admit them instantly.

While with one hand the man turned the key in the well-oiled lock, he with the other pulled a wire that communicated with a bell in the Governor's apartments the

ringing of which betokened that his presence was required in the vestibule.

With greater caution than they had used when entering the Bag of Nails Inn, the officers dismounted, and assisted their prisoner to the ground.

More than a dozen hands seized not of Dick in various ways, and, as the handcuffs were already tightly secured behind his back, he stood but a poor chance of getting free—so poor a one, indeed, that he made not the slightest effort to liberate himself, but allowed his captors to lead him up the steps and across the threshold of Newgate.

When the heavy door closed with its peculiar clang, Dick felt indeed that he was a prisoner.

Strange enough, however, no sooner had he come to the realisation of this fact than all his heaviness suddenly departed, his usual coolness, courage, and vivacity came back to him.

Drawing himself up to his full height, he looked around him.

Even though they stood beneath the roof of the prison, the police officers did not yet venture to let go their hold.

"The Governor," said Sir Marmaduke, sharply—"where is he? Send for him at once!"

"He will be here directly, sir," said the man on the lock. "I have already rung the bell, so that he will know he is wanted urgently."

At that very moment, the door communicating with the Governor's apartments was thrown open, and that individual appeared upon the threshold.

Mr. Cawthorn's successor was an under-sized, shrivelled-up, middle-aged man, who, to those occupying positions above him, was most disgustingly humble—indeed, the way in which he fawned upon the sheriffs and other high officials was positively sickening.

But to all the men and the prisoners he was a perfect tyrant, always choosing some opportunity or other for displaying his power.

From his servility, however, to the ruling powers, he was likely to retain his situation for a long time.

"What is all this?" he cried, sharply—"what is it? Speak, some of you, and tell me! What do you mean by keeping me in suspense in this manner?"

"I will soon inform you," said Sir Marmaduke, stepping forward. "But, first of all, just allow me to remark that my name is Braham—Sir Marmaduke Braham, chief magistrate of the county of Surrey."

Dick really thought that the Governor of Newgate was about to fall on his knees at once; but he did not, though he bowed his head so low that it was the greatest wonder in the world how he regained his perpendicularity.

He did not stand upright, however, but, continually oscillating backwards and forwards, and waving his hands so as to keep time with the movement, he said:

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Sir Marmaduke! I was not aware that you were present! I am very sorry indeed that I spoke so sharply, only, you see—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Sir Marmaduke, impatiently. "I see all about that! Just pay attention to me!"

"I am all attention, Sir Marmaduke."

"Well, then, I have brought you here a prisoner, no other than the notorious rascal—"

He stopped suddenly, and uttered a shout, and for a moment there were one or two who wondered what could be the cause.

It so happened that Sir Marmaduke, while speaking, was standing very near to Dick, and just in front of him.

No sooner did the word "rascal" escape his lips, than Dick, whose legs were at liberty, took one step forward, and, raising his right foot, subjected the baronet to the indignity of a kick upon his hinder quarters.

The Governor stood aghast.

Dick Turpin, with a smile on his lips, resumed his former attitude.

"I will have your life!" screamed Sir Marmaduke—"I will have your life, rascal, villain that you are! No, no!" he added, with a sudden change of manner—"no, no—I won't touch you—I'd scorn to do it! I'll wait my time, and, if it costs me half my fortune, I will have the best place to stand to see you hanged!"

"Just as you like," said Dick—"it's quite indifferent to me. Of course, you understand that my arms, being fastened behind me, prevented me from using my fists, as

I should have done, but I think my foot made a very good substitute."

"You shall be punished for this insolence, rest assured!" cried the baronet, foaming with rage. "Take care of him, Mr. Governor! He is a dangerous man—a most dangerous man! Don't lose sight of him for one single moment!"

"All right!" said the Governor—"you may depend upon me! Why, can it be possible?" he continued, as he looked closer. "Yes, yes, it is—I recognise him now! Why, you have really captured Dick Turpin!"

"Yes, yes—I have!"

"Speak the truth," interrupted Dick. "I say you didn't!"

"Be silent!"

"I shan't, without you choose to gag me!"

"It is not true that you captured him, Sir Marmaduke," interrupted Sir George. "The man surrendered himself to me. I took him prisoner, and therefore I claim the reward of a thousand pounds that is offered for his apprehension."

"And who may you be, sir?" asked the Governor, sneeringly.

"My name is of no consequence to you, but perhaps I had better say I am Sir George Hazlitt, Sir Marmaduke's neighbour."

The Governor bowed again.

"Really," he said, "the villainous rascal has had too much honour. The idea, now, to be captured by a baronet!"

"Pay attention to what I say," continued Sir George. "He was my prisoner, and was quite willing to follow me to Newgate without resistance, provided I had felt inclined to bring him; but Sir Marmaduke, being present, thought fit to take upon himself the management of affairs, so sent for this troop of officers, to whom, of course, I handed over the prisoner, and they have done no more than perform the very simple duty of bringing him here."

"Yes," cried Dick, "that's it—that's quite correct every word of it."

"Who told you to speak?" roared the Governor.

"Seek information of my elbow!" replied Dick.

There was a general titter at this, though one and all endeavoured to conquer their propensity to laugh.

"Be silent, then," said the Governor. "I will not allow you to say a word!"

"And you shall not prevent me," said Dick, "so what do you think of that? Now, I don't mind telling you something for your own good. If you desire to have peace and quietness in the prison, just let me have my own way; if you do not, take my word for it I will convert it into a regular little hell upon earth!"

CHAPTER DCCCLIII.

DICK TURPIN ENRAGES SIR MARMADUKE, BUT MAKES FRIENDS WITH THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

THE Governor of Newgate stood perfectly aghast.

The idea that such words should be addressed to an august functionary like himself, and, above all, by a prisoner, was monstrous in the extreme.

So great was his amazement that he could only stare with wide-open mouth and eyes at Dick, who nodded his head as much as to say:

"I mean it, every word of it."

What the Governor would have said or done we really cannot tell, but Sir Marmaduke interposed, saying:

"Pay not the least attention to him—treat all he says with contempt, and just listen to me."

"Yes—yes, I will listen—I am all attention, of course, but if ever—"

"Never mind him, I say—keep that to yourself. I want to know how this case stands?"

"What case, Sir Marmaduke?"

"Why, as to who is entitled to the reward?"

There was a pause—an awkward one for the Governor, for he did not want to reply so as to give the least offence to the baronet.

"I cannot presume to decide," he replied, at length, "and really the matter has nothing whatever to do with me."

"But you will have to give a receipt for the prisoner?"

"Oh yes—that's according to form."

"Then give it to the officers."

"No, no," said Sir George. "I object to that. The receipt should be mine, since it will show that the capture was made by me."

The Governor looked from one to the other irresolutely.

He was quite in a fix.

"I can't give two receipts," he stammered—"that's quite impossible, and as to who ought to have it, I am in doubt, though, after all, I should think the officers are the most proper."

"Yes, certainly," broke in Turpin—"give it to the officers, Mr. Governor, but mind you write across it that I was captured by Sir George Hazlitt."

The Governor gave the prisoner an angry glance, but Sir Marmaduke restrained him.

"A good suggestion," said Sir George. "I will have it done so; that puts an end to the difficulty at once. Surely you have no objection to making that addition to the receipt?"

The Governor made a wry face as he answered:

"No—I don't know that I have. It is unusual, yet it might be done."

"Then do it."

The receipt was duly written out and examined by Sir George to see that it was entirely to his satisfaction.

It was then handed to the police, who took it rather unwillingly.

They had quickly come to a decision on the disputed point, and their opinion was that Sir George was fairly entitled to the whole of the reward, so that they would have to depend entirely upon Sir Marmaduke for anything for themselves.

The baronet must have noticed this, for he said:

"Never mind all this, my lads—it shall make no difference to you. I am well pleased with the manner in which you have performed your duty, and I shall recommend every one of you, and my recommendation ought to be worth something; besides, I will be as good as my word with respect to the reward."

The officers were most enthusiastic in their applause, and would insist upon treating Sir Marmaduke with three cheers.

After that, at the wish of the Governor, they departed.

Sir George, as he passed by where Dick was standing, just muttered:

"I like your bold spirit, and, if only for that, would do everything in my power to aid you; but I consider myself guilty of having brought you into your present scrape, and I will try my best to get you out of it."

Dick had only time to murmur a few words of thanks, and Sir George was gone.

As soon as all the visitors had departed and the door was closed again, the Governor of the prison strode up to Dick in a very aggressive, defiant manner.

Probably his reason for so doing was that he knew Dick's arms were perfectly safe behind his back.

As for Turpin himself, however, he had quickly come to a decision as to how he should in future treat the Governor of the prison.

His position was a very peculiar one, and if by any means he could obtain the forbearance or good feeling of the Governor, it would be a great thing gained.

Therefore, in a calm and pleasant voice, he spoke before the Governor had time to pronounce the angry words that were hovering upon his lips.

"Mr. Governor," he said, "pray do not think anything of what I have just said—it was only to exasperate Sir Marmaduke. I owed him a grudge, and that was the only way in which I could pay it. A little while ago I made you a threat, now, if you like, I will give you a promise."

The Governor was astonished that he should be addressed in this manner by the prisoner, and as his astonishment prevented him from making an immediate reply, Dick continued:

"The promise is this: If you will put me into comfortable quarters and see that things generally during my stay here are made tolerably pleasant, I will promise you faithfully—in fact, I will give you my word—that I will make no attempt whatever to escape from your custody."

The Governor's surprise increased.

"If, now," he said, hesitatingly—"if I might believe what you are saying—"

"You may believe it," said Dick, "and place implicit

faith in it. I respect my word more than I should an oath. I have spoken, and it is for you to decide whether you will believe me or not."

The Governor remained for some time silent.

Of course he was well aware of the causes that had led to the suspension and finally to the dismissal of Mr. Cawthorn, his predecessor, and he was therefore certain if Dick Turpin should make his escape that the consequences would be very disastrous to him.

A cunning thought entered his brain.

His eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he answered:

"Well, Dick, I will take your word—you shall have the most comfortable cell there is in the prison, and you shall have every indulgence short of being permitted to depart. Now, what do you say to that?"

"Why, that I shall be always obliged to you; and depend upon it, any man's good will is better than his hatred, and I will sacredly promise you not to make any effort at escape—at least, not while things go on to my satisfaction, and when they do not, I will give you timely notice."

For the life of him, the Governor could not help laughing at the cool, easy, business-like way in which Dick spoke of his imprisonment.

"Well," he said, "come on quietly, and I will take you to the cell."

"But remember your promise," said Dick.

"Oh, yes, I'll remember it."

"Very well, then."

Dick held out his hands behind him significantly.

"Oh! you want the handcuffs taken off?"

"Yes, I do—they hurt my wrists confoundedly."

This was putting the Governor to the test, and he hesitated for one moment. He thought:

"Suppose, now, this fellow, of whose daring I have heard so much, should make a sudden attack upon us and escape by the door, what a fool I should look, and how much I should be blamed for taking his word!"

But the next moment he decided to have Dick released, for he reasoned with himself in the following manner:

"I will keep myself well upon my guard, and if he keeps peaceable and quiet, and makes no attempt at resistance or escape, I shall begin to put faith in him, for he would never have a better opportunity than the present."

The order was given, and the handcuffs were removed.

Dick gave himself a good shake.

He fully meant every word he said, and, turning quietly to the Governor, he said:

"You will never repent of this. Believe me, I am much obliged to you."

"Oh, don't mention it. If things can be managed quietly and comfortably, they might as well be as not."

"So I thought," added Dick, "and that's why I mentioned the subject."

The turnkeys were all very much surprised to see the Governor on such familiar terms with the prisoner; but, then, Dick was a prisoner of no ordinary kind, and the Governor wisely held him in dread; and, as we have already stated, it was part of his creed always to bow down before authority.

"You must not expect to find anything at all luxurious," he continued, with a laugh. "The comforts here are scarce. However, come this way."

Dick followed the Governor along a corridor and up a flight of steps.

Pausing before a row of strong doors, the Governor made a sign for one to be opened.

The fastenings were removed, and then really a clean and comfortable cell was disclosed.

It had a window in it of a size larger than was usual, and this window looked into a kind of court-yard.

"Ah!" said Dick, "this is better. I had no idea that you had anything of this kind in Newgate."

"Nor had we until lately," was the reply. "This is part that has been lately built. Will this suit you?"

"Oh yes."

"Very well, then, walk in and take possession. You must know, by a recent regulation, my strict duty is to leave two men or more constantly in the cell with you to watch your every movement, but I suppose that will not be pleasant?"

"Not by any means," said Dick. "I should prefer to be alone."

"Well, then, I will run the risk of disobeying my instructions."

"Then I shall be infinitely obliged to you. And I tell you what it is, Mr. —"

"Bradbury," said the Governor.

"Well, then, Mr. Bradbury, I can tell you that you will never have cause for regret if you continue to treat me as well as you do now—indeed, it will turn out one of the best things in the world for you, so mind that."

CHAPTER DCCLIV.

DICK TURPIN OPENS THE LOCKET, AND MAKES A FRIEND IN NEWGATE.

The Governor stared at Dick Turpin in the utmost surprise; but the highwayman's countenance underwent no change, and, for all he could tell, by the expression of it, Dick fully meant what he said.

"Well," replied Mr. Bradbury, at last, "I have not been Governor of Newgate very long, but if I continue in this post a hundred years I'll warrant I never have a prisoner talk to me in such an easy, off-handed way as you do."

"Very likely not," said Dick. "I don't hesitate to say you are a good fellow—a much better one than I expected to find."

The turnkeys, who stood on the threshold of the cell, were highly amused at this conversation, and afterwards it was repeated with all due exaggerations to their companions in the vestibule, the result of which was that, taking their cue from the Governor's conduct, they were prepared to treat Dick in the friendliest manner possible.

"Well—well," said the Governor, as he prepared to leave the cell, evidently by no means displeased with Dick's flattery, "I will make things as comfortable as I can for you, but you must be careful not to speak of any little extra indulgencies that I may allow you."

"Oh, certainly not!" said Dick. "Don't feel any tear on that score, I beg."

The Governor then withdrew, and, by his orders, the turnkeys closed the door after him.

While they were putting up the ponderous bar, and securing other fastenings, he said to them, in a whisper:

"You heard what I said just now? Of course I agreed that he should be left in the cell by himself."

The men nodded.

"But," he continued, "I don't care about trusting him too far, so—aha, it's a joke!—two of you shall remain constantly outside the door while he is here; then, if you hear or see anything unusual, the alarm can be instantly raised."

The Governor strode away without waiting for a reply, congratulating himself in his own mind upon the vast amount of cunning that he had shown in the transaction, and rubbing his hands quite gleefully as he went.

It was no small relief to his mind to have Turpin's word that he would not escape, as it would save him such a vast deal of trouble; and now this extra precaution, he felt, would make all things easy.

As for Dick himself, he was glad enough to get rid of the Governor, and as soon as ever the door was closed, took the locket out of his mouth, where he had managed to keep it concealed during the whole of the time.

His impatience with regard to it was very great, for he wanted to know how and by what means it could possibly get him out of his present strait.

He tried to open it.

But his haste and eagerness were so great as to defeat his object, and he had to pause and look more carefully at it.

He then noticed that it was secured by a small spring, which he pressed, and immediately the locket flew open.

What he saw within it by no means increased his confidence, for all he could perceive were two small portraits, one of a male and the other of a female.

They were, however, beautifully executed, and set round with small precious stones.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed—"how is this to help me? Have I been befooled after all?"

He looked more carefully still at the portraits, and then two cries of surprise rapidly escaped his lips.

In the portrait of the female he recognised the features of the mysterious lady

There was a great alteration in them, yet the likeness could not fail to be recognised.

Evidently the portrait had been painted when she was a very young girl; now she was, to say the least, middle-aged.

The other portrait was still more unmistakable.

The features as well as the costume, were well known to Dick soon as he scrutinised them.

It was a portrait of his Majesty the King.

But Dick was by no means satisfied that he had seen all the locket contained.

Surely there should be some direction in it as to how he should act, and some suggestion as to the means by which the portraits could be made useful to him.

But, although he spent nearly an hour in examining the locket in every part, he failed to find anything else, and finally came to the conclusion that the portraits were all that it contained.

He closed it sharply.

With a feeling of great disappointment, he thrust it into his pocket and began to think.

"I can't believe that she meant to play me false," he said, at length. "There's only one way I can think of by which this locket can be made useful, and yet, surely I should have had some hint about it, but I have not, though the idea must be tried if possible. I must find a means of conveying this locket to the King."

This certainly seemed about the only reasonable thing that could be done with the locket, and yet how great would be the difficulty for anyone confined in a cell in Newgate to communicate with the King—indeed, any other person than Dick Turpin would probably have considered it an impossibility, and have never even made the attempt.

But Dick never lost anything for the want of trying, and, having made up his mind that the locket should be handed to the King, he set to work to think by what means this purpose could be carried out.

The task was beset with innumerable obstacles, and he thought of fifty things without being able to decide on any.

He was interrupted in his ruminations by the removal of the fastenings upon his door.

Listlessly, he turned his eyes in that direction, and saw a turnkey enter.

To Dick's surprise, he closed the door behind him.

There was an expression on this man's face which Dick interpreted as being favourable to himself.

"Well," he asked, quickly, "what is it? Nothing disagreeable I hope?"

"No, captain—nothing disagreeable. I have come to know what there is you would like."

"What I should like?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, to speak the truth, that you would just take me up and pop me down somewhere outside of the prison."

The turnkey shook his head.

"I can't do that, captain—I can't indeed. If I could I would, mind you," he added, in a suppressed tone that seemed to be perfectly earnest.

"Would you indeed?" said Dick, grasping him by the hand. "For what reason is it that you are so willing to befriend me?"

"Well, I've got two reasons, captain."

"Quick, then—out with them!"

"Well, the first is owing to a little circumstance that perhaps you may have forgotten, but which I shall always remember. You once saved my life."

"Saved your life?"

"Yes; you don't recollect me, very likely."

"I am certain I do not," replied Turpin, gazing more closely into his countenance, "and, as a rule, if I once see a person I can always recognise him again."

"Well, you never did see me—at least, not that I know of," replied the man.

"And yet I saved your life?"

"Yes."

"But how so?"

Do you not recollect that, one night, a long time ago now, you called in at a cottage and asked for something to eat? The woman who kept it said she was very poor, yet put the best meal she could before you, telling you at the same time that her husband was lying ill in bed, and

dying for want of nourishment, which she had not the means to procure?"

Dick reflected.

"Yes, yes—I have some faint recollection of it. What then?"

"Why, you took your departure very suddenly, and after you had gone we found under the plate a large sum in gold. That money enabled my wife to purchase the things I stood in need of, and so saved my life. I rapidly grew better, and finally well, though when I recovered health and strength my stock of money was exhausted."

"Well, you were quite welcome," said Dick. "It was no favour on my part; the service your wife rendered me was not repaid by the one I rendered in return."

"Well, we may be of different opinions as regards that," said the man. "However, you saved my life, captain, and, to the longest day I live, I shall always feel grateful to you for it, and I will do anything in my power for you."

"I am heartily glad to hear it," was the reply, "more especially as there is a service which you can render me. But you spoke of another reason—what is that?"

"Why, it happened, strangely enough, but one of the gentlemen who came in with you when you were brought here—Sir George, I think you call him—"

"Yes—yes."

"He watched for me outside, and as soon as I appeared told me to follow him. I did so, and we entered a public-house. He approached the subject very cautiously, but finding how friendly disposed I was to you, was very glad."

"Here," he said, "I know that in Newgate, as everywhere else, much can be done with money. Take this purse of gold, and see that Dick Turpin has everything which the regulations of the prison will permit. If you require any more, come to me as soon as your funds are exhausted, and take him word from me that I will use all my influence to procure his liberation."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes, he did, and here, captain, is the purse just as I received it."

"Well, but I don't want it, my good fellow. Keep it—keep it, I beg, and use it as occasion may require."

"I will, captain, the King shall not be more comfortable than you are, provided the Governor does not interfere, and I don't think he will, if we keep things snug."

"The King?" repeated Dick. "Yes, that reminds me of what I want."

"What, captain?"

"Why, paper, a pen, and ink—I must write a letter."

"I shall have to smuggle those in when I get a chance," was the reply, "for it is entirely against the rules to furnish those articles. However, you shall have them."

"And as soon as possible," said Dick—"every moment is of importance."

"All right, captain. Is there anything else?"

"No, no—nothing at present until that is done."

"Anything to eat and drink?"

"No. I tell you until this affair is off my mind I cannot attend to anything else."

CHAPTER DCCCLV

DICK TURPIN WRITES A LETTER TO OLD MATTHEW AND DESPATCHES IT BY THE FRIENDLY JAILER.

"I WILL go at once, captain—direct, and I will be back here again as quickly as is possible."

With these words the friendly jailer left.

After his departure, Dick more fully realised how fortunate this event had proved for him.

Nothing more unexpected than finding a friend beneath the roof of Newgate could he have thought of, and yet, in a most substantial way, he experienced the benefit that always follows the doing of a good action.

Unless the man was black and treacherous indeed, he would be entirely devoted to Turpin's interests.

From the fact of Dick asking for writing materials, it may be guessed that he had made up his mind how to proceed, and so he had, for the finding of this friend changed the aspect of affairs entirely.

His intention was to write a letter to his companions, and entrust it to his friend to deliver.

He had resolved not to send to the Three Spiders, however, because that would be too dangerous.

His connection with that place could not be too carefully kept secret.

He would send it in the first place to old Matthew, in Drury Lane, and trust to him to forward it to the proper quarter.

The turnkey was absent only a short time, and when he came in, the expression of his face showed that he had been successful.

"Here you are, captain," he said—"a drop of ink, there's a pen, and here's a piece of paper."

"Thanks—many thanks. It will take me some little time to write this letter, so come in again when you next have the opportunity; by that time it will doubtless be finished."

"Very good, captain—I will."

"But stay," said Dick, "you did not tell me how it was you came to be turnkey in Newgate."

"Well, the fact is, after I got well I was a long time trying to get fresh work, but I failed—why, I knew not. I tried many different occupations, and at length happened to hear by chance that turnkeys were wanted for Newgate. I applied, and succeeded in getting the situation, and here I have been ever since."

"That explanation is simple enough then."

"Yes, captain; but there's one thing more. Do you happen to know that two men are posted outside the door?"

"I fancied so."

"Well, then, it is the case; so that when we speak to each other we must sink our voices a little above a whisper; those other fellows may betray us."

"You were quite right to caution me," said Dick. "For the moment, I had forgotten all about them."

The turnkey said no more, but departed, and as soon as he was alone, Dick set down, first to think and afterwards to write.

The latter was to him a very tedious operation.

Yet, after awhile, he succeeded in producing the following epistle:—

"DEAR MATTHEW,—

"I suppose by this time you have heard that I am a prisoner in Newgate. The circumstances of my arrest are very peculiar. No doubt you wonder that I should have surrendered at all, knowing how often I have declared that I would rather die. Circumstances alter cases, though, and when we meet again, which I hope will be soon, I will relate all the details to you; I have not time to write them."

"I want you, as soon as may be after the receipt of this letter, to send over to a certain place I need not mention, and let them know that I am safe. Tell them not to be alarmed, and for the following reason:—

"Along with this letter you will receive a small locket, take care of it, for on that depends my liberation. Strange, is it not? but I have faith in its power. I want it delivered to the King with all speed, wherever he may be at the present time. And here let me give you a particular caution: T. K. will be the proper person to deliver it, for, mark me, the locket must, by some means or other, be placed in the King's hand. It will not do for it to reach him through any official connected with the palace. At all risks, hazards, and difficulties, access must be had to the King in person, and the locket presented."

"There is no one I can think of better calculated to perform such a task than the person I have named. Let him go as soon as possible, and with all speed let me know the result."

"The bearer of this you can fully trust in every respect. I would pledge my life as to his fidelity."

"If you like to make inquiries you can soon learn how 'twas that I came into possession of this singular locket, and then you will not feel so surprised at my pinning my faith upon it."

"Above all, I should like you to endeavour to reassure Maud. I know she must feel greatly distressed at what has happened, but let her know from me that my position is by no means so perilous as she imagines, for should, by any unlucky accident, the locket fail, I have a friend here

by whose aid, I doubt not, I should be able to make my escape.

"Last of all, impress upon everyone the necessity of remaining quiet where they are, and making no effort to release me, as any such attempt on their part will only get them into trouble, and increase the difficulties of my position.

"If you like to send word back, you can do so. Do not be afraid of putting trust in the bearer.

"Yours,
"DICK."

Turpin took a great deal of pains over this letter, and he was occupied a long time in writing it.

Scarcely had he laid down the pen, however, when the friendly jailer entered.

"Here it is," Dick exclaimed, folding up the sheet of paper and addressing it. "I want you to take it to one Matthew Gale, the landlord of the White Horse, in Drury Lane. Do you know it?"

"I think so—a large, old-fashioned building, is it not, standing at the corner of White Horse Yard?"

"Yes, that's it. Here's the letter, and be sure that you deliver it into the hands of Matthew Gale himself. You will know him, for he is tall and stout, with a jolly, good-tempered-looking countenance, and usually wears a white apron. Try as well to slip the letter into his hand when there's no one by."

"All right."

"And this," said Dick, giving him the locket—"above all things be careful of that; do not lose it, for upon it all my hopes depend."

"You can trust me, captain," was the reply. "Such a service as this is a mere trifle, but yet I will perform it as well as if you had gone in person."

"I am satisfied to trust you; take it now and go at once."

"But, captain," said the man, "don't you want something to eat or drink? You have been here a good many hours now."

"I know that, but I am accustomed to go long without food, especially if I have anything important to do."

"But when I come back?"

"Why then, if you like, you can bring me the best dinner you can procure, for when I know the letter and locket have been delivered safely, and are in Old Matthew's hands, a great load will be lifted off my heart."

"Well, then, I will start, and make haste back."

"Do so—do so."

The turnkey carefully secreted the letter and locket about him—then left the cell.

It may easily be imagined that Dick Turpin suffered no small degree of impatience and anxiety after the jailer had departed.

In spite of everything, and try as he would, some doubts as to the fellow's honesty would obtrude themselves upon his mind.

It was a dreadful thing to think of, for should he be betrayed in this, his position would be dangerous indeed.

And so, as minute after minute passed away, his uneasiness increased, and, rising to his feet, he paced rapidly up and down his cell, pausing every now and then to look through the barred window, hoping that he should catch sight of the turnkey approaching.

Dick had no means whatever of ascertaining the time, for, of course, on his first introduction to the vestibule of Newgate, every article was removed from his pockets, and the locket would have gone as well had he not so cleverly concealed it.

Yet he fancied that a very long time indeed had elapsed since the man's departure—much more time than was needful for him to perform the journey to Drury Lane and back, and for Matthew to send a message in return.

Unless by imagination we could place ourselves exactly in his present situation, it would be difficult indeed to form a proper estimate of the anxious state of his mind, or guess what doubts, and fears, and hopes by turns assailed it.

That the jailer had been absent a very long time he was quite certain, although his state of suspense might have caused him to exaggerate it.

Now, however, there was no mistaking the fact that the day was fast closing in, and in a little while longer it would be dusk, if not dark.

But in that cell of Newgate the days were much shorter than they were outside the prison, for it was not until long after the sun had risen in the morning that any daylight found its way into it, and by sunset it was nearly dark.

At length, however, Dick heard a footstep in the passage.

He paused, and directly afterwards the fastenings were removed, the door opened, and the jailer entered.

"You have been absent a long time," said Dick, as soon as it was prudent to speak.

"Yes, captain, I have; but you will find that I shall be able to give you a very good explanation of it."

CHAPTER DCCCLVI.

TOM DAVIS GATHERS SOME INFORMATION RESPECTING OLD MATTHEW FROM THE LOQUACIOUS BARBER.

WE revert now to the proceedings of Tom Davis.

It will be remembered that when he left the Three Spiders it was very early in the morning indeed.

The horse he had was a good one, and took him to London in capital style, so that he arrived before many of the inhabitants were astir.

He took the precaution, however, to leave his horse and trap at an inn about half a mile from Drury Lane, because he was anxious to arrive there without attracting any notice.

Walking quietly down on the side opposite to that upon which the White Horse stood, Tom Davis pretended to be gazing with interest at the shop windows, but in reality he did this only that he might be allowed a better opportunity of looking carefully on all sides of him.

But as he proceeded he saw nothing at all peculiar or unusual.

Arriving at length opposite the White Horse, he saw that the shutters were down and the door open.

But, more by chance than anything else, Tom Davis cast his eyes upwards, and, very greatly to his astonishment, he caught sight of a couple of police officers who were on the top of the house, looking down over the parapet.

They made some signs with their hands, but what they portended Tom could not guess.

But, looking before him, he saw two men dressed in plain clothes, who were replying to the signals given by those above.

"Oh, oh!" he muttered. "So Matthew is troubled with another visit of his old friends, is he? Well, if such is the case, the wisest thing I can do, perhaps, is to keep out of the way for a time. Where can I go?"

Tom looked around him again, for if by any chance he could remain somewhere within sight of the White Horse Inn, why then it would be so much the better.

Fortune favoured him.

It will be remembered that nearly opposite the front door of the White Horse Inn was a barber's shop.

The barber himself was an object of considerable aversion to Old Matthew, for the simple reason that he was very fond of prying into his neighbours' business.

Of course, we all know that Matthew had many secrets that he wished to keep carefully concealed from the eyes of those around him, and he had often been annoyed by this barber's inquisitiveness.

Tom Davis, however, no sooner saw the shop than he felt quite a sensation of pleasure.

Here he could enter and remain for some time, and probably learn what was going on at the White Horse.

Just as he reached the door of the shop, some person came hastily out, and following him, almost treading on his heels, was the barber himself.

He stopped on the doorstep, and looked attentively across the road.

What more he would have done is hard to say, for just then Tom Davis went up to him and entered the shop.

"Bless my heart," the barber exclaimed, in brisk tones, "I never knew such a thing in all my life!"

"As what?" asked Tom, as he seated himself in a chair.

"As business this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I have been uncommonly busy—most uncommonly busy, and just because I didn't want to be seen."



[DICK TURPIN IS SUMPTUOUSLY REGALED IN HIS CELL BY THE FRIENDLY JAILER.]

scarcely believe it, sir," he continued, as he adjusted a cloth beneath Tom's chin—"you'll scarcely believe what a many useless, idle hours I pass here; but then, of course, there's nothing going on. But, mark me, I'll be bound if there's anything particular occurring, people keep dropping in one after another, and I don't get a moment to look about me."

"Dear me," said Tom Davis, "I'm quite sorry I entered."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir—don't mention it! I shall be done in a moment."

The barber took it for granted that Tom required shaving, and to this operation our friend submitted first, not that he intended to leave when that was over, for he meant to have his hair trimmed, which would occupy some little length of time.

"May I venture to ask," said Tom, "What it is that is going on this morning that you are so anxious to witness?"

No. 176.—BLACK BESS.

"Oh yes, certainly—I will tell you with the greatest of pleasure! It is no secret—no secret at all. Did you happen to notice that public-house opposite?"

"Yes, I think I did."

"Well, then, I may go so far as to say that it is one of the most notorious places in all London."

"In what way?"

"Why, all the highwaymen and flash coves of every kind go there if they are in trouble, and the landlord contrives to hide them somewhere, so that if the officers search ever so strictly they can't find them."

"Dear me—how extraordinary!" said Tom Davis, as if in the greatest astonishment.

"It's a fact, I can assure you," continued the barber, speaking with great rapidity. "I could fill a whole volume with things that I have witnessed myself, for, being rather curious about such matters, and living exactly opposite, of course I have had ample opportunities for observation."

"So I should think."

"I have heard, though," he went on, "that Matthew Gale, or old Matthew, as we generally call him, although he will place a highwayman or almost anyone in safety, yet refuses to hold out his protection to anyone he knows to be a murderer; but that may or may not be true, and whether it is or not, after all, does not signify. There you are, sir—all done now. Good day, sir."

"Not quite," replied Tom. "I am sorry to hinder you, but now I am shaved I must have my hair dressed; it would be impossible to leave it, so you must make the job complete."

The barber gave a sigh, and began to get his implements ready.

"Do you know any of the particulars of what is going on to-day?" asked Tom.

"No," replied the barber, "scarcely any, and that's why I am so anxious to find out."

"Then, if you like," said Tom, "as I am in no particular hurry, and as I feel curious as well as yourself, perhaps you would not mind leaving me here for a few moments and ascertaining?"

"My dear sir, I shall have great pleasure, and while I am gone you can amuse yourself with looking at the newspaper—there it is. Now I'm off."

Glad enough, apparently, to get out of the shop, the barber darted through the door.

Tom was not likely to interest himself in the newspaper while things of so much importance to him were going on around, so, flinging it aside, he hastened also to the door, which he opened a very little way, so as to take a peep at the barber's proceedings.

That individual crossed the road rapidly, and entered the White Horse.

"He has gone to head quarters for his information certainly," was Tom Davis's mental observation. "What an extraordinary fellow; but what an intolerable nuisance he must be to old Matthew."

The barber was absent a long time—so long that Tom Davis's patience would have been put to a sore trial had it not been for the fact that the officers had not yet left, and he did not wish to enter the White Horse until they had.

At last, however, the barber, with his usual smirk upon his lips, came tripping across the road.

Tom no sooner saw him approaching than he resumed his seat, and pretended to be reading the paper very attentively.

"I've been a long time gone," the barber began, as soon as he appeared; "but, then, as you were kind enough to say you were in no hurry, I thought it would not matter."

"Oh, not in the least!" said Tom. "I have been very well interested during your absence."

"That's all right, then."

"But what have you learned?" inquired Tom, with some anxiety.

"Why, it seems the police are after a man who is suspected of being the author of several mysterious murders. The police got information that he was seen to enter the White Horse, and that he had not emerged again."

"But stay—did you not tell me that this landlord refused to hold out any protection to murderers?"

"Yes, certainly, and I made the remark as soon as I heard the particulars; but the officers are rather incredulous, so they have been all the morning searching from the cellar to the attic."

"And have they found him?"

"No, not even the ghost of a clue. Old Matthew takes it very coolly, declaring most positively that no one of the kind is in the house; but the officers take no notice of that, for they are well aware he would say just the same thing if the man they wanted was under their noses."

"He is really quite a remarkable character," said Tom Davis. "You interest me greatly; I really think I shall feel inclined to run across when I leave you just to have a peep at so extraordinary an individual."

"Oh, he is nothing much to look at," said the barber, "and I should not think so badly of him as I do but for one thing."

"And may I ask what that is?"

"Yes, he does not support his neighbours as he might. Instead of coming to me to be shaved he actually has the meanness to shave himself. Then, as for hair-dress-

ing, he never requires it, for his head is about as bald as a head could be. He even does not patronise me by buying a wig," the barber added, in conclusion.

Tom Davis could not help feeling greatly amused at all he heard, and some more time still was spent in this kind of conversation.

The barber himself was never so happy as when he could get hold of some one who would listen patiently while he talked.

And so long after the operation of hair-dressing was over, Tom remained in the shop.

And yet it did not seem strange for him to do so, for his hand was on the knob of the door all the time, as if he was about to take his departure each moment.

At length, feeling anxious to see whether the officers had left, Tom passed out into the street again.

He glanced up and saw nothing of the officers, but he thought, after all, it would be more expedient if he allowed an hour or two to elapse before he paid his visit, so he walked briskly in the direction of the Strand, intending to while away his time somewhere else.

About an hour and a half afterwards he returned, and approached the White Horse as circumspectly as he could. He was rejoiced to find that the barber was not standing at his door, as he feared he would be, in which case he might have run across the road and entered at the same time, intending to take a friendly glass with him.

That, however, would by no means have answered Tom's purpose, so, with a feeling of great relief, he hastily crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER DCCCLVII.

IN WHICH TOM DAVIS AND OLD MATTHEW HOLD A CONSULTATION RESPECTING DICK TURPIN.

THERE was an air of quietude about the interior of the inn that seemed to tell Tom Davis at once that the officers had taken their departure.

With increasing confidence and ease, he made his way along the passage to the bar window.

Only a few people were sitting in the public-room, and they were conversing with each other in low tones, as if upon particular business of their own.

Tom Davis glanced all about him, but seeing no one who would observe his movements, he left the bar window and proceeded to the door, which he opened hastily, and as hastily closed after him.

Opposite was that door we have so frequently had occasion to mention, which communicated with old Matthew's private sitting-room.

Here Tom fully expected to find his old friend, so he opened this door also without ceremony.

His conjecture proved correct.

Seated at a table, on which was spread a repast of a very substantial character, was old Matthew.

The opening of the door caused him to look up, and no sooner did he see who had entered than he dropped his knife and fork and uttered an ejaculation.

"Why, bless and save us, Tom! is it you?"

"It is," was the answer, and, as he gave it, Tom closed the door quietly behind him.

"But what on earth brings you here to-day?" said old Matthew. "I'm glad to see you. Sit down, you are just in time for breakfast. I am rather late this morning; but those confounded officers have kept me hard at work."

"It is rather late," said Tom, seating himself as he had been desired, and thinking at the same time that the meal looked very much more like a dinner than a breakfast.

But old Matthew was a rare trencherman, as he knew very well.

"Now, Tom," he cried, "help yourself—don't be afraid; and then, while I finish, you can tell me what has brought you here to-day."

But Tom Davis only replied to this invitation by shaking his head.

"I can't eat, Matthew," he said, "or drink. Can it be possible that you do not know what has brought me here?"

"No. Why, what has happened—nothing serious, I hope?"

"My trust is that the report is without foundation," replied Tom Davis, "yet I can scarcely indulge in such a hope."

"What—what? Confound it, man, why don't you speak out?"

"Why, this morning, early, I heard that Dick Turpin had been captured and was confined in Newgate!"

This intelligence came upon old Matthew like a thunder clap, and in his astonishment he gave the chair on which he sat such a jerk that it went rolling along the floor on its castors until stopped by the wall.

"In Newgate?" he gasped, rising to his feet. "Impossible—impossible—nothing of the sort!"

Tom Davis drew a long breath.

"I am glad to hear it."

"Why, how on earth could such a report have reached your ears? If it was true, depend upon it I should have heard all about it long ago."

"So I should think," returned Tom Davis, who was beginning to feel more at ease. "However, Matthew, if you will have the patience to listen for a few minutes I will give you an account of the whole affair, from beginning to end."

"Proceed, then—I am all attention."

Thereupon, Tom described how Dick had taken his departure—how Black Bess had returned—how they had waited for him in vain, and at last, how the newsman had brought the intelligence.

"Well, it's very strange," said old Matthew, thoughtfully, and resting his head on his hand—"very singular indeed; but I have been away from home the last few days. Particular business, connected with a relative of mine, took me down to Dover. I started three days ago, and did not return until this morning, and when I did arrive I found my house all in the greatest confusion, for a party of police officers had taken it into their heads that I had secreted somebody or other. I was vexed, of course, to think the place should have been so overhauled during my absence; but yet my mind was easy, because I had no one concealed."

"Then," said Tom, beginning to look grave again, "it is quite possible that during your absence Dick's arrest may have been effected, and since you have returned home doubtless you have been in such a state of confusion and excitement that you have had no time to hear anything."

"Well, Tom, there may be something in that, and I am inclined to think there is; I should be more so but for one fact."

"What is that?"

"Why, I think it was only about the very last time he was here that Dick Turpin most positively assured me that he would die a thousand times rather than surrender."

"Yes—yes, I have heard him say the same thing often."

"Well, and Dick is invariably as good as his word, so therefore I think the intelligence, after all, must be untrue."

"I fervently hope so," said Tom Davis, "for I can assure you that his comrades are in the utmost consternation; and as for Maud, the shock was terrible, and when I left her she was only keeping herself up by the hope that I should bring back good news."

"Which I hope you will," said old Matthew. "But don't let us sit here any longer talking thus and remaining in suspense. If Dick is in Newgate, the fact will be easily ascertained, and quickly too; if he is not, you may depend he is well able to take care of himself."

"Yes, yes—I have no doubt about that; and I beg, Matthew, that you will, without any further delay, make the necessary inquiries."

"Will you go too?"

"No; if you have no objection, I would prefer to sit here until you return."

"It will perhaps be quite as well," replied Matthew, and as he spoke he took down his hat and changed his coat.

Just as he was about to quit the room the door was opened, and the girl who minded the bar in his absence said:

"You are wanted—now—in a moment."

Matthew just nodded to his old friend and passed into the bar.

At the window was the turnkey who had shown himself to be such a good friend to Turpin.

"You are Matthew Gale, I suppose?" he said.

"I am."

"Well, then, take this, and this, and I will wait here for your answer."

While speaking, the man handed over the letter and also the locket, both of which Matthew received with considerable surprise.

Hastily opening the letter, he glanced at its contents.

At the first word the expression of his countenance changed suddenly.

Turning round, he made his way into the inner room.

"It's true, Tom," he said, as he sank down into a chair—"true, Tom—every word of it. Just read that; I am so confused that I can't."

Tom Davis took the letter with a trembling hand, and, in a low, shaking voice, read what Turpin had written.

Until its perusal was finished, no word was spoken, and then, looking into Matthew's face, Tom said:

"Well, now, my friend, what do you think of that?"

"Think?" replied Matthew, wiping his forehead. "I hardly know what to think; it seems impossible. Just let me have a look at the letter, will you?"

Then, as if unable to believe his ears, he glanced rapidly over the sheet of paper.

"What can all this be about a locket?" he exclaimed.

"Stay—here it is; let us look at it."

With some difficulty, he found out the means by which the locket was opened, and he gazed with great interest and attention upon the two portraits.

Tom Davis gazed also.

"I remember," he said—"I remember now. Dick told me all about it, and you will understand better if I make you acquainted with the facts."

In as few words as possible, Tom Davis then related to old Matthew Dick Turpin's peculiar adventure with the mysterious lady, to whom he had rendered such an important service, which she had requited him by the bestowal of the locket.

Old Matthew looked thoughtfully.

"That, then, accounts for Dick having surrendered himself. He must have great faith in it—more faith than I should like to put in anything."

"He has good reasons, rest assured," said Tom Davis.

"I have every confidence in him. Now that I have read his letter, with all speed I shall hasten back to the Three Spiders, and to-night, in all probability, Tom King will seek his audience with the King."

Matthew shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems an impossibility to me!" he exclaimed.

"How on earth can he hope to get an audience?"

"That I know not; I shall leave it to him. He is very cunning in all expedients; and if any person could succeed he would."

Old Matthew was silent.

"You may as well inform me, or ascertain, if you don't know, one fact that will save him some trouble, perhaps."

"What is that?"

"Why, whether the King is at St. James's or at Windsor."

"At Windsor, I believe. But before you go I will take care that there shall be no doubt upon this score."

"Who brought the letter? Where is he?"

"At the bar window," returned Matthew. "He looks to me like one of the warders of the prison."

"Then," suggested Tom Davis, "had we not better have him in here for a few moments, and get from him some personal information?"

"A good thought," replied old Matthew—"a very good thought; we'll have him in at once. It will be some satisfaction to know from some one who has seen him so lately just how Dick Turpin is."

CHAPTER DCCCLVIII.

DICK TURPIN CONTRIVES TO MAKE HIMSELF VERY UNCOMFORTABLE IN NEWGATE.

THE friendly jailer was at once called in, and a conversation of considerable length followed.

There was nothing in it, however, that deserves to be repeated, since the reader is already acquainted with such particulars as the turnkey was able to give.

Yet it was a very great satisfaction indeed both to Tom Davis and old Matthew Gale to hold conversation with a man who could tell them how Dick spoke and looked

"He is not very easy in his mind," the turnkey said; "but he will be all right when I return. You must understand this letter was written yesterday, soon after his arrival in Newgate. He gave it to me, and I promised to deliver it at once, but, unfortunately, was prevented from doing so until this morning."

"How so?"

"Why, quite unexpectedly, and at the last moment, the Governor set me on to some extra duty, which prevented me from leaving. I can assure you the captain's disappointment was very great when I took the first opportunity of returning to his cell and informing him of my failure. It was then just growing dark. He had been in the greatest suspense, fully expecting that I had taken the letter, and was wondering at my delay. However, I told him that he must wait until to-day."

"And I suppose you took the first opportunity to get away this morning?"

"I did."

"Well, then, when you return, tell him that no effort on our parts shall be wanting to secure his release, and if the locket fails, we shall adopt other means."

"I will be sure to tell him. Believe me," he added, earnestly, "you can fully trust me, and any further message you have to send you had better give to me verbally, and I will repeat it to him. There will then be no fear of the letter being lost or discovered."

"Good!" said old Matthew. "But at present that is all that I can think of to say."

"Except," added Tom Davis, "that we are all very anxious about him, Maud especially, and that I shall endeavour to calm her as well as I am able."

Soon after this the turnkey took his leave.

He was only allowed to be absent from the prison for a certain time, but, being a favourite of the Governor's, he was allowed indulgences of various kinds.

After he had gone, Tom Davis and old Matthew sat for some time in consultation.

At length the latter departed, in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the King.

This was information easy to be obtained.

In about half an hour old Matthew returned, saying: "The King is at Windsor, though it is not known how soon he may leave the castle for London."

"That will do," said Tom. "It only shows what necessity there is for promptitude of action. I'll be off at once."

"It puzzles me exceedingly," said old Matthew, "and I shall be heartily glad to see him out of Newgate. That locket will have more power indeed if it releases him, for I know how determined all the authorities are to secure him, if possible."

"Well, we shall see," added Tom Davis, who went on. "By-the-way, Matthew, there's one little circumstance I may as well mention to you, which is this: You have a neighbour opposite—a barber."

Matthew nodded.

"He is the most inquisitive fellow I ever met with, and his especial pleasure is to find out what is going on here."

"I know it," said old Matthew—"I know it very well. I have been waiting, hoping to catch him and put an end to his tricks. I shall do it some day, I know."

"Be careful, Matthew," continued Tom—"pray be careful! You don't know what mischief a man like that might do!"

"It is impossible to guess, and I am much obliged to you for the caution. I have had my eye upon him for a long time past."

"And now, Matthew," said Tom, "one word before I go. If anything particular occurs, you may rely upon seeing me here again very shortly, so don't be out of the way if you can possibly help it."

"I will not, you may depend. I feel quite as much concerned in this business as you do, and I shall keep my eyes open to pick up all the intelligence I can."

With this understanding the two friends parted.

Tom Davis would have left the inn by the front door, but old Matthew prevented him.

"No, no," he said—"you had better not go that way—the officers might see you. Come here—it will be better to pass through the stables."

Of the interior arrangements of the White Horse Tom Davis knew little except from hearsay, and his surprise

was very great when Matthew took him out into the yard and led him into the secret stable that we have previously described.

From this, it will be recollected, there was a communication with the numberless streets lying between Drury Lane and Clare Market, and in which anyone might easily get out of sight.

Tom Davis glanced around as he emerged into the open air.

But, so far as he could tell, there were no police officers on the watch.

Taking a circuitous route, he made his way to the inn where he had left his horse.

As he hurried through the streets, he was surprised to find how late it was—the day was really drawing to a close.

Before he could reach Ealing, he felt tolerably certain night would be at hand, and, with the view of returning as hastily as possible, he made his horse put forth its best speed.

How he arrived the reader is already aware, and now the intelligence he carried is known also.

This leaves us at liberty to follow the turnkey back to Newgate.

As he had said, Dick's disappointment and vexation on the preceding night were very great indeed, and during the long hours of darkness he remained counting every minute as it passed, for his mind was in too feverish a state for sleep.

He was now awaiting, with the greatest impatience, the turnkey's return.

When he caught sight of him, one glance into his countenance was sufficient to assure him that the man had been successful.

"All's right, captain," said the turnkey, closing the door—"all's as right as you could wish!"

"That's a relief."

"No doubt."

"But begin at the beginning, and tell me, quietly and calmly, every little circumstance—do not spare one detail."

The turnkey complied, and, as he proceeded, Dick's composure and light-heartedness returned.

"Bravo!" he said. "I feel now like a free man! I have a presentiment that my longer stay in Newgate will be brief in the extreme!"

"I hope so, captain. And now, then, let me entreat you to partake of something. You have eaten nothing yet, and it may be necessary for you to keep up your strength."

"I am all right now," was the answer, "and can do justice to anything."

"That's the style, captain! You speak quite different now! Have patience for a short time only, and I will set such a dinner before you as would suit a prince!"

Dick smiled at him, and the man left.

A sensation of great faintness came over him immediately afterwards.

Now that relief was afforded to his mind, Nature asserted her supremacy.

Such a change as was perceptible in him would have astonished any beholder.

The turnkey was as good as his word.

In an incredibly short space of time, considering all the difficulties, a most excellent repast was brought in.

The fact must not be overlooked that in those days the discipline maintained inside a prison differed widely from that of the present day.

It is notorious that the greatest criminal, if he only had the means at command, could do almost what he liked, except to leave his cell.

It was a shame and disgrace that such a state of things should be permitted, but the abuse continued until long after the time of which we write.

Dick drew his chair up to the table eagerly.

"Now, captain," cried the turnkey, as he removed the covers, "if that does not tempt you, I'm a Dutchman! And here, look, are a couple of bottles of the best wine that can be obtained in London."

"We shall do rarely," said Dick. "I really think I never felt so hungry in my life."

"Lay on, then! I will wait upon you."

"No you won't!" said Dick, "You will sit down as

well. You are my friend, and shall be treated as such."

The turnkey was nothing loth.

With a pleased expression in his eyes, he drew a stool up to the table, and for some moments there was a perfect silence—both were too busily engaged in doing duty to the good things before them to speak.

The wine was tapped, and proved to be indeed of the most excellent quality.

A sensation of calmness and satisfaction crept over Dick.

Glass after glass was drained, and, could any person have taken a peep into that particular cell in Newgate at that moment, they would have been struck with the greatest amazement.

Dick leaned back in his chair, as though perfectly content and at home.

"Upon my word, now," he exclaimed, "life in Newgate is not so bad, after all!"

"Not so bad!" repeated the turnkey. "And yet I expect you will be glad enough to leave it."

"I shall; for, no matter if its comforts were ten thousand times greater than they are, I should still be deprived of the greatest blessing of life, and that is liberty."

"Hush!" said the turnkey. "I can hear somebody coming. Who is it, I wonder?"

Both listened.

A step was heard without, and then the sound of a voice came to their ears, though the words uttered could not be distinguished.

"It's the Governor," cried the turnkey, in some alarm. "Confound him! What in the world does he want here? Where can I hide, I wonder? Oh, nowhere, of course!"

CHAPTER DCCCLIX.

MR. BRADBURY, THE GOVERNOR, CONVEYS A DISAGREEABLE MESSAGE TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.

ONE rapid glance round the cell was quite enough to make the turnkey aware that all attempts to conceal himself in it would be futile.

The only hiding-place, if it may be so called, was underneath the table, and the turnkey rather shrank from availing himself of it.

Dick was by no means disconcerted—he was just in the humour to be pleased with everything.

The heavy fastenings were slowly undone, and the door thrown open.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Governor, sniffing the air as he entered—"dear me; what do I smell?"

"The good things of this earth," said Dick. "I am pleased to see you, Mr. Bradbury; had I known you were about to pay me a visit, I would have postponed my dinner so as to have had the pleasures of your company."

The Governor stared, as well he might.

The idea of his sitting down to dinner with a prisoner was a rich joke.

"You are making yourself comfortable, I see," he exclaimed; "but, then, I suppose, you think of your motto: A short life and a merry one."

"Yes, yes—begone dull care! Would you allow me the pleasure of taking wine with you, Mr. Bradbury?"

"Bah! nonsense! Don't be a fool. If I wink at proceedings of this kind, it is only to show you how willing I am to do you any good turn for your promise not to make the attempt to escape."

"Yes, yes—I know that," replied Turpin. "I don't look as if I was breaking my word, do I?"

"You certainly do not, and I should not have looked in, only once a day I make it a practice of paying a visit to every cell, and I saw no reason why yours should be an exception."

"Certainly not, Mr. Bradbury—certainly not. I feel rather hurt to think you will not take wine with me. But, however, it don't matter, I won't bear you any grudge for it. Whenever you like to call I shall be proud and happy to see you."

Mr. Bradbury hardly knew whether to be amused or annoyed at this familiarity, and while in this state of hesitation his eye chanced to fall on the form of the turnkey.

"Oh, you are here, are you?" he cried. "What tho

devil do you mean by it? Is this attending to your duty?"

"Beg pardon, sir, if I've done wrong," said the turnkey, humbly, "but I'm off duty now, sir, so I thought there was no harm."

"Well, then, you thought wrong. Be off at once; I will not allow you to remain in any cell with the prisoner, mind that!"

The turnkey retired, glad enough to make his escape.

"Don't be hard on him," cried Dick, "the fault is all my own. I tempted him with money first to get what he has brought, and then persuaded him to remain, for above all things in the world I do hate to dine alone."

The Governor drew a long breath.

"I have come across some strange characters in my time," he exclaimed—"very strange ones, but I'll be hanged if you don't beat them all! No one would believe that you were in the slightest bit of trouble."

"No more I am," was the reply, given with a smile. "I feel quite comfortable—never better in my life."

"Well, we shall see; but there's one thing I have invariably noticed."

"And what may that be, Mr. Governor?"

"Why, that those who carry things off with such a high hand and pretend to be so very game always show the white feather at the last."

"Then you will find I shall be an exception to your rule," said Turpin, with more earnestness than he had before made use of. "But something seems to tell me that we are destined to be much better friends than we are at present."

"Well, I don't know that. I have one piece of information to give you, which perhaps will make a change in your manner."

"May I inquire what it is?"

"Oh, certainly; I intended to tell you before I left. I suppose I need not remind you that, having once been tried and sentenced, that little formality will not have to be gone through again."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dick. "I was not certain. However, I am not sorry."

"Not sorry? Why, it would have given you a day or two longer to live. But the warrant that was sent here for your execution has been carefully preserved, and it has just been returned by the Secretary of State with a fresh endorsement upon it, thus saving a world of trouble."

Dick was silent.

"According to the instructions contained in it," continued the Governor, "your execution is appointed to take place on the third day from this at Tyburn. A very strong feeling is against you, and I have certain knowledge that the Secretary of State has determined at all risks and hazards the sentence shall be carried out. Newgate is watched in every part—not a mouse will leave it without being seen, so things look very awkward for you, though I must say you do well to make the best of what little time there is left."

"Yes," replied Dick, as calmly and unconcernedly as before. "If during the remainder of my stay here things go on as pleasantly as they have begun, I shall have nothing to grumble at. I shall be quite content."

The Governor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, perhaps you are tired of your life; if you are not, I am at a loss to imagine why you should treat your coming death so coolly."

"That's not the reason, though perhaps you may know it ere long. On the third day from this, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Then that will be Friday."

"Exactly; and on Friday all the preparations at Tyburn will be made, and by this hour all will be over."

"So you think," answered Dick, significantly; "but time proves all things."

"A true proverb," said the Governor, "and it will prove that you are at the end of your career on that day, without you intend to break your word."

"I have no thoughts of doing so; but if I should resolve upon that course I will give you timely notice."

This seemed the best joke of all, and the Governor, after a few more words, left the cell.

When he had gone, Dick rose, and somewhat of a change came over his countenance.

"So soon," he said—"so soon. I have already expected

they would be so prompt. Tom, indeed, will have to be expeditious to perform his task, and the locket must be of rare efficacy if it liberates *ms.* Well, well—time alone will show."

He paced the cell somewhat uneasily, endeavouring to picture to himself as best he might how his comrades were engaged at that time.

"I wonder if they know the time is so short?" he muttered, pausing before the window; "if so, Tom would start to-night; if not, he might delay, and the delay would perhaps be fatal. But away with these gloomy forebodings, I will hope and trust for the best!"

So saying, he folded his arms and continued to gaze out at the little bit of sky visible through the grated window of his cell.

He continued to watch until it gradually darkened and darkened in colour, and until the faint glittering stars appeared.

Then he knew that night had come.

More anxiously than on the preceding night did he continue to watch.

His brain was all the time occupied in suggesting to him what his comrades might be doing.

He would have given much could he but have obtained one peep at their proceedings.

That, however, was impossible, and so, in uncertainty and suspense, the time passed away.

How long he sat there he knew not, but at last exhausted nature gave way, and he sank off into a deep and dreamless slumber, from which he did not awake until he heard some one removing the fastenings of his door.

He started hastily and opened his eyes.

To his astonishment he discovered it was daylight.

"Have I indeed slept so long?" he murmured. "Well, it is better, so the night is gone. I wonder now whether Tom King has been successful, and if he has, whether the locket will produce the desired effect?"

Just then the door was opened, and the friendly turnkey entered.

"I will not let them know I am so anxious," Dick thought. "I will assume a carelessness of demeanour, even though I feel it not; the only thing that I can do is to wait with patience, and in the meantime make myself as comfortable as I can."

"Breakfast, captain," said the turnkey, entering—"and a rare good breakfast it is. I hope you will do justice to it."

"Put it down," said Dick, "and help yourself."

"No, no, captain—I must not. The Governor is a strange man, and I know how to deal with him. It vexed him to see me here last night. I don't wish to get him at all angry, and so it will be best for me to comply with his wishes. Of course, if he liked he could prevent me from paying my visits altogether, which would be a bad thing for both of us, I think."

"You shall be the best judge," said Dick, "in that. I leave it entirely to you."

"Then I am off, captain; when I can leave the prison I will slip off to Drury Lane. I may be able to pick up something you would like to hear."

"Very likely," said Dick—"very likely."

With these words the turnkey left, and Dick sat down to the table.

But in reality he had but little appetite.

Now that the time grew closer he grew more and more doubtful respecting the virtues of the locket, and he was troubled as well by the statement the Governor had made respecting the vigilant manner in which the prison was guarded.

He was conscious that, should the locket fail, nothing could save him from an ignominious death on the morrow.

CHAPTER DCCCLX.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT FOR WINDSOR CASTLE.

HAVING taken such a calm survey of his own very perilous condition, Dick Turpin might indeed feel anxious in the extreme.

But there were others who fully shared that anxiety with him.

To make all clear, however, we must now go back to the moment when Tom Davis arrived at the Three Spiders Inn.

He was besieged at once with a multitude of questions; but, raising his hand, he said:

"If you will all be silent I will tell you everything, from beginning to end, and by this means much time will be saved."

It may perhaps be imagined with what amount of interest the highwaymen, and Maud, and Ellen listened to his recital.

Maud, learning for certain that Dick was in Newgate, gave vent to a passionate burst of grief; for, inspired by the words Tom Davis had uttered ere he left, and hoped on to the last, and believed that he was free.

Davis, however, tried to make things look as bright as possible, and produced the locket.

Great as was the interest his narrative had excited, yet it was as nothing to that which they felt while gazing upon this little trinket.

The King's features were well known to them all, but not so those of the lady.

"It's a very strange business, truly," said Tom King, after Davis had informed him that it was Dick's wish he should deliver the locket—"a very strange business; but yet I hope everything will turn out successfully."

"It is our only hope," said Tom Davis; "and before I left I too good care to inquire where the King was staying. He is at Windsor, though it is not known how soon he may leave."

"Then," replied Tom, "there can be no doubt that the best thing we can do is to start off at once; any delay might prove of the greatest consequence."

"Yes, although he did not mention it, Dick no doubt wishes the locket to be delivered immediately; and besides, the sooner we know the result the better prepared we shall be to act, and the more time we shall have in case of any emergency."

"Very true," said Tom King. "It is fortunate our horses are all so fresh as they are; the journey to Windsor will be performed easily and rapidly."

"You will let us accompany you?" said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack. "You cannot tell what aid and assistance you may require."

"I cannot. If you had not spoken then I was just about to ask you to accompany me."

"But," said Tom Davis, with a little hesitation, "I don't like to raise up obstacles and to throw cold water on your plans, but yet I should very much like to know by what means you hope to gain access to the King?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall be guided entirely by circumstances and my good luck. If they fail me I have no other guide."

With a great effort Maud wiped aside her tears, and, advancing towards Tom King, looked him earnestly in the face, as she said:

"In pity and mercy let me know your inmost thoughts. Do you really believe that this locket will procure Dick's liberation?"

Tom paused ere he replied.

Then, in a voice of great earnestness, he said:

"You must remember that the service Dick rendered to the person who gave him this locket was a very important one indeed, and, thinking over all the circumstances, I don't believe that such a gift would have been proffered had it not been felt at the time that it was all powerful."

"You really think it, Tom?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then," she said, "I will master my grief and hope on."

"Do, do—perhaps ere another twenty-four hours elapse the captain will once more be amongst us."

"Hasten—hasten," said Tom Davis; "night is closing in, and you have a long ride before you; if you like, I will begin to get the horses ready."

He did not wait for any answer, but left the inn at once.

The three highwaymen looked carefully to their weapons, provided themselves with ammunition, and also took with them a few other articles which they fancied might be required in the course of the night's adventure.

This done, they said farewell to Maud and Ellen, and

hastened to the stables, where they found the horses nearly ready.

Tom Davis glanced around him, and finding only the highwaymen were near, said:

"I feel very, very uneasy, I can assure you."

"What about?"

"Why, that locket."

"In what respect?"

"Why, don't you happen to know that Windsor Castle is always well guarded by a strong force of military, and more especially when the King happens to be there? By what means do you hope to pass the sentinels?"

Tom drew a long breath.

"It will be an awkward job, I am afraid," he replied, at length; "but yet, if courage, coolness, and stratagem will effect our purpose, rely upon it we shall succeed."

"Well, I leave you to it," said Tom Davis. "You are more used to getting yourselves out of scrapes than I am, and perhaps you will be able to think of something that I should not."

"That is very likely indeed," said Tom King. "And now farewell! You may expect us at daybreak, if we meet with success; if not, we shall remain somewhere close at hand, on the watch for another opportunity."

With these words, Tom sprang into the saddle.

His companions had already mounted, and they stealthily took their departure through the plantation.

On the present occasion, Tom King was, to all intents and purposes, the leader of the expedition, so, without saying a word upon the subject, Claude and Jack placed themselves slightly in the rear, prepared to follow wherever he might lead.

Tom's brain was too busy to permit of speech; moreover, the rapid pace at which they were going would have made conversation very difficult.

He had resolved at once upon the route he intended to take, and, having crossed the Thames, he took off across the open country, thus materially diminishing the distance to his destination.

There was another reason for this course, which was that they were now scarcely likely to meet with an interruption of any kind, whereas, had they kept on the high-road, they might have encountered some of the numerous bodies of police that they knew were on the watch for them.

There was only once that the highwaymen paused, and that was at a small roadside inn situated about half-way.

They were attracted to it by a dim light that was shining from one of the windows.

The clatter of their horses' hoofs as they drew up in front caused the landlord and the ostler to make their appearance.

"Will you alight, gentlemen?" said the former.

"There's every accommodation."

"No, no," returned Tom King, hurriedly—"we cannot stay! A little hay and water for our horses is all we want, and while they are eating it we will take a draught of your best October ale."

"Very good, gentlemen."

The stay here did not occupy many minutes, yet both horses and riders felt much refreshed by it, and in better tune for performing the remainder of the journey.

With undiminished speed they galloped on, until by the faint light of the new moon they perceived in the distance the massive tower of Windsor Castle and the vast expanse of forest all around it.

Great circumspection was now required in all their movements, but, with a boldness that was somewhat surprising, Tom kept on in a straight line for the castle.

"I wish we had had the opportunity of reconnoitring," he said, slackening his speed at the same time. "Our task would then have been so much easier. Now I can scarcely tell how we are to discover which is the weakest point of the defences."

"Let us draw a little closer," said Claude Duval—"we shall be better able to judge then."

In a few minutes afterwards, they found themselves in a position that afforded them a view of a considerable portion of the castle, and here, concealed by the shadow cast by some huge trees, they paused.

For some moments not a word was spoken—all had their gaze fixed upon the building before them.

"And so that is Windsor Castle?" muttered Tom King at length. "I have never been so near it before."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval. "But there's one thing that strikes me very forcibly."

"What's that?"

"Why, supposing you should get over the difficulty of effecting an entrance, how should you manage, in so vast a building, to find the King?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"There is time enough to think about that when I get inside," he said. "It's foolish to burden the mind with too much."

"Yes, I agree with you there. But then, suppose the King should be in some part of the castle remote from the point at which you may enter, and that you may be so fortunate as to guess the route, how far do you think you could proceed without being seen by some one who would know immediately that you were an intruder?"

"There are too many supposes, Claude," said Tom, with a light laugh, "but I know what you mean. The difficulty of getting inside the building is almost insurmountable, and you wished to remind me that when that was done much would still lie before me to be accomplished."

"That is precisely what I meant."

"Well," said Tom, "just let me get inside. If I can do that, I shall have great hopes of performing my mission. Let us draw a little closer."

"Be cautious," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or we may be seen."

"All right! Tread as silently as you can."

Slowly and with extreme caution the highwaymen drew somewhat closer to the royal residence, and this they were enabled to do unperceived, in consequence of the huge trees that were growing everywhere.

At last they saw before them a wall, the height of which might be twelve feet or rather more.

Beyond that appeared to be a garden, and further on still the walls of the castle itself.

As soon as he perceived it, Tom said:

"That looks a favourable point at which to make the attempt. What say you, comrades?"

"That wall might easily be surmounted, certainly," they said. "But then, that is not all. Look—what do you think of that?"

Tom looked, and then, round an angle in the wall, he saw a soldier come in sight.

The mechanical manner in which he walked a certain number of paces, and then turned round and walked back again, showed that he was a sentinel.

CHAPTER DCCCLXI.

TOM KING GETS ONE STEP NEARER TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSE.

BREATHLESSLY the highwaymen watched the dusky figure of the sentinel, until he disappeared round the angle of the wall.

Even after that they did not venture to move or speak.

At length, in a faint whisper, Tom said:

"Remain where you are, perfectly still. Let us notice how long a time will elapse before he comes in sight again."

They waited, and from the duration of his absence, they guessed that he had a tolerably long walk to perform.

When he had disappeared round the corner for the second time, Tom said:

"Follow me. We will see where he goes to, and what he does."

With greater caution than ever, they slowly made their way from the trees, until they performed the end they intended.

The wall was still before them, only in this place it seemed to be somewhat higher.

It required a piercing glance to make out the figure of the sentinel.

But at last they perceived him at some distance.

Then he paused, and he was seen to be joined by another.

A salutation of some kind was exchanged, and they turned again.

"Well, now," said Tom King, "the question is, would

there be time for me to climb over the wall while this sentinel is at the further end of his beat?"

"I think not," said Claude. "In my opinion, you would most certainly be seen."

"Then what is to be done?"

"Wait awhile, I think, and endeavour to comprehend our position a little better than we do at present; all around us is so very strange."

They were silent, for the sentinel now was very near to them.

Following his movements they perceived something which else would probably have escaped their notice.

This was a sentry-box placed against the wall, near the corner of it, and here the soldier stood for a short time, then resumed his monotonous duty.

"It seems to me," whispered Sixteen-String Jack, "that the best plan to adopt will be to seize the soldier and gag him, then get over the wall."

"But," objected Tom, "the other sentinels would notice that he did not perform his march as usual, and the alarm would be raised."

"I don't know that. Supposing that I put on some of his accoutrements and acted sentinel, how then?"

"That's a better idea, and it will be perhaps possible to carry it out successfully. But how about that relief of the guard—what should you do then?"

Jack was puzzled.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Claude, "I have hit upon it at last. No doubt the men are changed every two hours. We must wait until the change takes place, then one of us, whoever happens to be most like the soldier, will personate him, while you will know then that you have two hours clear before you to perform your task."

"I think that would be the best," said Tom King—"at any rate, we will think over it until the guard is changed, and then, should anything better be thought of, why, we will try to carry it into execution."

This being agreed upon, the highwaymen all became silent and still.

It was fortunate that they thought about the change of the guard, for in a few moments afterwards they were startled by hearing the rattling of a drum.

After that there was a silence, and then they perceived a small body of men advancing.

The sentinel stopped at once.

They came towards him. One of its number took his place; he fell in with the remainder, and they passed on.

The highwaymen watched all these proceedings with the greatest possible amount of attention.

The changing of the guard occupied but a very short space of time, and then Jack, touching Tom on the arm, said quietly:

"Now then, comrades, what say you? Shall we make the effort or not? Now is the time, or never."

"I can think of nothing else so likely to achieve success," was Tom King's reply.

"Then let it be done."

"Be cautious, then—we must pounce upon the sentinel, and seize him in a moment, taking care that he has not time to utter the faintest cry, otherwise there will be an immediate alarm."

"It is not so very difficult," said Jack. "We will leave our horses here, and as soon as the sentinel turns the corner we will dart across and stand in the shadow of the sentry-box; then, as soon as he appears, let one of us place a hand upon his mouth, and the others hold him tightly."

"Yes," said Claude Duval, "the whole thing must be accomplished with speed and silence."

Another moment elapsed, and then the sentinel again disappeared from view.

As they had arranged, the highwaymen started forward.

The distance they had to go was insignificant, and, to their great satisfaction, they reached the shadow of the sentry-box without having caused the slightest alarm.

They now stood in readiness to seize the soldier directly he turned the corner.

They listened, and could hear his regular heavy footstep as he marched on.

Little did that sentinel think that he was about to be dealt with in so summary a manner.

He had been long at his present duty, and had never met with anything to vary the dull routine of it.

He was therefore wholly and entirely unprepared for what took place.

The highwaymen took the opportunity.

While Claude, darting forth, placed one hand immediately before the soldier's mouth, Jack seized him from behind, and Tom King, standing in front, with his sword drawn, said, in a threatening whisper:

"Move hand or foot—struggle, or attempt to speak—and you die!"

The man was so thoroughly taken aback by what had occurred that he was unable to move a limb.

He only stared at Tom King with eyes stretched wide open by astonishment.

With great dexterity, Sixteen-String Jack stripped off the upper portion of the soldier's uniform, Tom King, by threats, compelling him to surrender each article quietly.

When this operation was over, Sixteen-String Jack bound him tightly, and then, by means of a piece of rope doubled and twisted, gagged him most effectually.

This was managed by introducing the rope into his mouth like a bit, and tying it tightly at the back of his head.

It was possible for him to make a very faint sound, but it was so faint that it was not worth troubling about.

Perfectly helpless, he was now carried by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, and placed inside the sentry-box.

"I will take his place," said Claude—"it will be better, for you know I have had a little military training, and he appears to be about my height."

"Agreed!"

Claude hastily put on the soldier's uniform and picked up his musket.

"Hush!" he said, and before his companions could utter another word he marched off along the wall.

Some little time had of course been occupied by these proceedings, still it was not long—no longer, really, than a sentinel might have paused near his box had he chosen to do so.

But Claude was anxious not to be too long, and so he marched forward with a confident step.

Reaching the end of his beat, he found himself face to face with another soldier.

"All's well!" said the other sentinel, turning round.

"All's well!" replied Claude, supposing that to be the proper salutation.

He turned hastily round when he spoke, and marched off.

The other stopped abruptly.

"Well, that's odd," he said—"that sounds quite like a strange voice; and yet it can't be—it is my fancy."

Those words just reached Claude's ears, and he thought to himself how necessary it would be to be careful when he returned to that point of his beat again.

Reaching the sentry-box, he said to his companions:

"Over with you, and be quick about it. Leave me here—I shall be all right!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes—don't trouble yourselves on my account. I shall hold my position so long as it is tenable, and when it ceases to be so I shall make a run for my horse."

"Do so—do so. On no account suffer yourself to be made a prisoner."

"I will not. And now I must leave you—it will not do to halt too often, or perhaps suspicion may be aroused."

Claude marched on as before, imitating the movements of the real sentinel very well indeed.

Tom King looked up and wondered how the wall was to be surmounted.

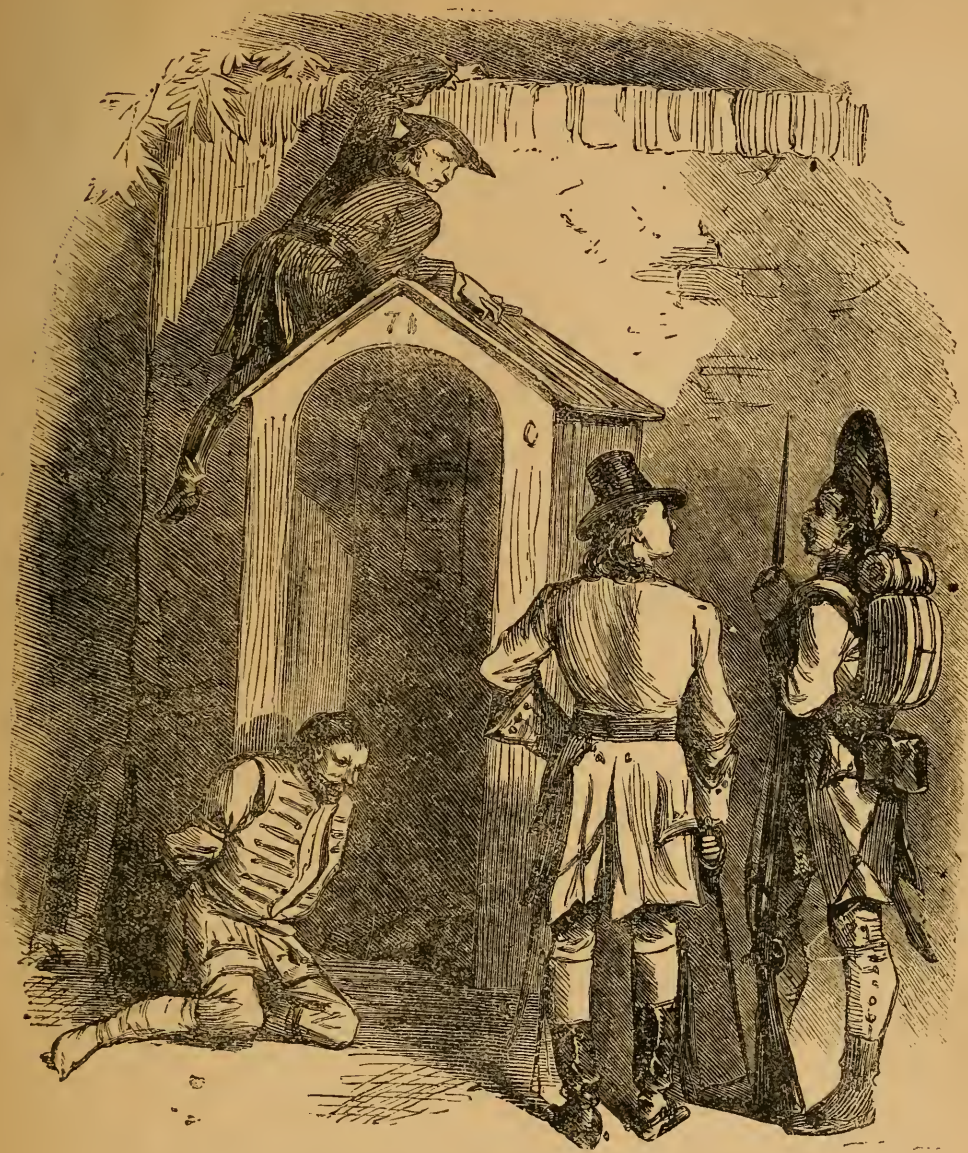
The sentry-box at once suggested itself to him, but it was a difficult thing to mount upon it, as there was neither hand nor foothold, and a little thing would turn it over completely.

They waited until Claude came back again.

As soon as they explained their difficulty, he said:

"Well, I will stand on this side and press against it with all my might, then you mount as well as you are able; when once on the top of the sentry-box the remainder will be easy."

"I could mount with Jack's assistance," said Tom, "if



[CLAUDE DUVAL PERSONATES THE SENTINEL, AND TOM KING SCALES THE WALL.]

he would bend his back; but then I don't see how Jack is to accompany me, and really after all, I think there is no necessity for it. No, no; Jack, if you are willing, I will leave you here?"

"Just as you please, Tom; you have the command in this enterprise, though, of course, I should prefer to be with you."

"No, no—one is less likely to be seen than two. Come, Jack, bend your back and I will return with all possible speed."

Jack bent his back as desired.

Tom stepped upon it, and in this position was able to gain the top of the sentry-box.

Here he drew himself up carefully until he could look over the top of the wall, being careful not to raise his head any higher than he could avoid.

No. 177.—BLACK BESS.

As he expected, some gardens, very beautifully laid out, were on the other side, and his eyes quickly roamed over the enclosure, in order to ascertain whether any persons were near or not.

All, however, was perfectly silent and dark, so, with a sudden spring, he swung himself clear over the wall. Then, hanging at arms'-length, dropt gently upon the soft earth below.

So rapidly and cleverly was the feat performed that, unless some person had been looking very carefully at that part of the wall at that precise moment, he could not have been seen.

Claude resumed his march, and Tom King remained standing just where he had dropped, and wondering what should be his next proceeding.

CHAPTER DCCCLXII.

TOM KING FINDS HIS PERILS AND DIFFICULTIES INCREASE AT EVERY STEP.

GAZING through the trees, the first thing that attracted his attention was a blaze of light, proceeding from what appeared to be the range of windows on the ground floor of the castle.

Strains of music, too, came faintly upon his ears, and therefore it was easy to conjecture that some scene of festivity was going on within.

The point, however, upon which Tom felt the greatest amount of uneasiness and which made him hesitate to move was whether there existed an inner circle of sentinels.

If this should prove to be the case, how should he contrive to pass them?

The gardens themselves, however, were so very dark and silent, that Tom felt great hopes of being able to creep forward unperceived, even if anyone should be on the watch.

This, the more he reflected, seemed unlikely, for, judging by appearances, this was some private portion of the grounds into which no one would be permitted to intrude.

Using as much caution, however, as he would have done had he felt quite certain that sentinels were near, Tom King crept slowly in the direction of the lights.

In a short time he was able to see them distinctly.

The range of windows that was illuminated was a very long one.

The music had ceased, but now it burst forth again with a sudden crash, and even as it did so some doors were thrown wide open.

Tom glanced keenly through the portal, and as he did so he saw a crowd of persons of both sexes elegantly and brilliantly attired.

Some were in the spacious hall, and others descending a staircase; evidently they were all about to issue forth into the grounds.

Perceiving this, Tom crouched down as low as he could behind a huge tree, trusting that its shelter would conceal him.

From this position he watched the approach of the glittering throng.

The threshold was crossed, the broad flight of steps descended, and then, amid the silence that prevailed, he could hear the low murmur of courtly conversation, and occasionally the faint sound of laughter.

The number of guests who thus poured forth into the garden surprised Tom beyond measure.

They dispersed themselves over every part of it, and he began to feel very doubtful whether he would be able to remain concealed where he was without being discovered by some one.

Then a bold and fresh thought darted into his mind.

He felt surprised that this thought had not occurred to him before.

It was no other than to quit his place of concealment and mingle with the crowd.

Among so many his presence could scarcely be noticed.

Most certainly there would be many who were strangers to each other, and might not he pass for one of the strangers?

The only difficulty was about his costume, which was by no means in keeping with that of the gentlemen around.

Still, in the gardens it was dark, and even this might escape notice.

At any rate, it would be better, he thought, to stand up boldly than to remain so evidently in hiding.

Scarcely had the idea crossed his mind than, without reflecting much upon it, he proceeded to carry it into effect.

Lightly knocking from his clothes the dust that was upon them, he stepped forth with all the boldness in the world on to one of the well-kept footpaths.

The success he met with was something far beyond his expectations.

Several glances were cast upon him, it is true, but no one ventured to accost him, or, so far as he could tell, to make any remark as to his appearance.

But time was passing rapidly on; there was the necessity

for urgent speed, and, delightful as the gardens were, Tom by no means wished to linger in them.

"Surely," he thought, "this would be a favourable opportunity for gaining the interior of the castle."

At any rate, he resolved to try it, especially when he perceived that many of the guests, tired of their promenade in the open air, were rapidly returning.

Surely he might drift in with the crowd; and it seemed to him that, once beneath the roof of the great building, the remainder would be easy.

Not without considerable trepidation—for he knew how much depended upon his actions—Tom King directed his steps towards the spacious doorway.

Several were before him, several behind him, laughing and chatting gaily.

He was now, however, in the full blaze of the light, and he could scarcely refrain from shrinking a little.

Assuming all the boldness and confidence he possibly could, however, he strode on.

Two domestics in gorgeous livery were standing at each side of the doorway, and when Tom fairly crossed the threshold and passed them he drew a long breath of relief—he considered it was such a good omen of future success.

Drifting with the tide of persons, he was carried along the corridor towards another door that stood wide open.

Congratulating himself mentally, Tom King walked on, every step increasing the amount of confidence he already felt.

Suddenly, however, he felt a light touch on his arm.

He affected to disregard it, but it was repeated, and this time more unmistakably.

Glancing round, he found himself face to face with an elderly gentleman, who was splendidly attired, and who carried in his hand a long white wand.

"Excuse me," he said, somewhat abruptly, and yet from sheer force of habit making a bow while he spoke—"excuse me, but I have not the honour of your acquaintance—your features are quite unfamiliar. May I trouble you to produce your card of invitation?"

Tom smiled and endeavoured to look indifferent.

"My card of invitation?" he said. "Well, that's amusing. I have not one."

"Indeed?" said his interrogator. "That is strange; but you treat this matter lightly. By what right do you intrude?"

"The best," said Tom King, boldly. "I come here on secret service, and my business is with the King himself."

"With his Majesty?" said the other, involuntarily taking two or three paces backwards.

"Even so," said Tom; "and if you will do me the favour of showing me into his presence at once I shall be obliged to you. I was looking everywhere for you when I felt you touch my arm."

An expression of perfect bewilderment now came over the old gentleman's countenance, as he ejaculated:

"Step this way—step this way."

Tom obeyed without hesitation, and soon found himself in a little ante-room.

"Now, sir," said his guide, "just let us come to an understanding. Who can you be, so ignorant of the usages of the court? What do you mean by saying that you come here on secret service?"

"Simply what I say," returned Tom; "and let me assure you it is important that I should be immediately ushered into the presence of his Majesty."

"Is it upon business?"

"Certainly—urgent, pressing business."

"Then it is not his Majesty you wish to see, but his secretary. Come this way."

"No, you mistake," said Tom King. "my business is with the King only."

"Well, well, this way," said the other, impatiently—"this way, I say. I am wanted elsewhere. How on earth you came to be admitted to the castle I am at a loss to imagine."

To this speech Tom made no reply.

He considered that he was making much better progress than he could possibly have anticipated.

He followed willingly enough in the old gentleman's footsteps.

The little ante-room communicated with a larger apart-

ment, and beyond that there was another and another, until Tom began to grow tired of his long walk.

All at once his guide stopped at a door, which was immediately opened.

Admittance was allowed, and Tom found himself in the presence of a very plainly-dressed, middle-aged man, who was seated at a table.

Before him were a quantity of letters and other matters, with which he seemed to be busily engaged.

"This gentleman," said Tom's guide, "I found among the guests. He says he comes here upon secret service, and I to see the King."

So saying, he abruptly left, and his Majesty's private secretary looked at him inquiringly.

"Secret service?" he said. "What secret service?"

"Excuse me," said Tom, bowing and speaking with the utmost respect, "but I assure you my business is with his Majesty, and his Majesty alone."

"But," said the secretary, half-angrily, "do you not know that nothing can reach the ears of his Majesty except through myself? Speak on, and let me know what your business is without any further delay. I have no time to waste."

"I regret very much to decline," said Tom King, "but I again most positively assure you that the business is of so private and personal a nature that I can only communicate it to his Majesty himself."

"Bah!—nonsense! I know all his Majesty's private business; and let me hear this—be quick! If you refuse, you will have to go as you came; it is quite impossible for you to see the King—you might know that."

Tom King hesitated.

He was puzzled how to act.

Should he indeed trust his message with this man? Should he confide the locket to him and await the result?

No. Tom made up his mind instantly.

Had not Dick Turpin positively enjoined him to place the locket in the hands of no one but the King himself?

There must be no circumlocution.

"It vexes me exceedingly," he said, addressing the secretary, "to appear so pertinacious; but believe me again when I say that not even to you can I confide my business."

"Then," said the secretary, "I will have you arrested! Ten to one it is some bold, audacious attempt to assassinate the King. Your story about secret service must be a mere subterfuge. Here, guard—guard!"

He shouted out the last words at the top of his voice, and even while he did so he struck his hand upon a bell that stood upon the table before him, and which no doubt was an additional summons for immediate assistance.

CHAPTER DCCCLXIII.

TOM KING BECOMES SOMEWHAT ALARMED AT HIS POSITION, BUT MEETS WITH AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE.

THESE energetic proceedings on the part of the King's private secretary were so sudden and so unexpected that for a few seconds Tom King was half bewildered, and scarcely knew how to act.

The sound of hasty footsteps in the corridor served to arouse him from his state of indecision.

With one bound he reached the door.

It was his intention to secure it effectually.

But the only fastening he could perceive consisted of a small brass bolt.

This he slipped rapidly into its socket, and, when he turned again, he saw that the secretary had hastened to one of the windows, which he threw open, while he again cried:

"Guard—guard! Here—a spy—a traitor! Guard—guard!"

Tom King sprang towards him as he cried:

"Silence—silence, or your life! Once more I demand to see the King."

But the secretary only continued his vociferations in a louder key than ever.

Finding remonstrance of no avail, and hearing on the massive panels of the door a succession of his very knocks, Tom King doubled up his fist, and the next thing of which the secretary was conscious was that he was lying

in a decidedly damaged condition underneath one of the tables.

It so happened that this table was covered with a long crimson cloth, so that when he rolled under it he vanished completely from sight.

All hope of Tom King keeping his presence in the castle a secret was now at an end.

The first thing he had to do was to secure his own safety.

How this could be done was more than he could tell, yet he resolved to suffer anything rather than abandon the task of delivering the locket to the King.

The blows on the outside of the door now much increased in violence, and there could be no doubt that those without were endeavouring to force an entrance.

One glance round the chamber was given by Tom King.

Then, finding there was no other door save the one by which he had entered and at which the soldiers of the guard were doubtless now standing, he turned again towards the window.

It was very dark outside.

But below him he could just distinguish some of the shrubs and plants in the garden.

The distance to jump was somewhat alarming, but then, Tom was aware that the soil was soft, and would serve most materially to break the force of his fall.

Without further delay, then, he jumped through the window, and, as he had fully anticipated, alighted on the soft mould in safety.

As soon as he had recovered his feet, however, and took a glance around him, he saw lights flashing through the gardens in various directions, and he could hear voices shouting to each other.

Almost at the same moment a party of soldiers made their appearance at the window through which he had just escaped, and in loud tones they called upon those who were in the garden to search narrowly for the intruder.

Tom felt very anxious and distressed.

If his own safety was all he had to care about, it would have been a very different matter.

The question was, would it be possible for him to find some place of hiding that would serve to conceal him from the close search that was about to be made?

He shook his head while asking himself the question.

Such a thing seemed very far from likely.

Close to where he stood, however, was one of the winding gravel-paths which spread like a net-work over the entire gardens.

On each side it was planted with some kind of prickly shrubs of a very ornamental character, and growing to a great height from the ground, but as impenetrable and as insurmountable as a high brick wall.

There was something of a very private and secluded character about this path.

It was plunged in total darkness, and it seemed to Tom that it offered him by far the best chance of concealing himself.

Without further consideration, he turned down it, and ran hastily forwards for some distance.

Despite the darkness, he was able to follow its windings and turnings tolerably well.

All at once he came to a sudden stop, and a cold perspiration began to break out upon his forehead, for he feared that he had taken a wrong step, and had fallen into a trap.

At the extremity of the path he had been pursuing was a conservatory, from the glass windows of which Tom could see rare plants growing in great luxuriance and beauty.

But in honour of the festival that had that night been celebrated, this conservatory had been prettily lighted up by a number of coloured lamps suspended either from the ceiling or from the branches of the ornamental trees.

The effect of these coloured lights was to shed an amount of illumination around resembling twilight.

To venture into this conservatory, Tom felt would be madness, for the probability was that such a place would be much resorted to by the guests.

He tried to turn either to the right or to the left, but found this impossible, owing to the density of the prickly vegetation.

"I will retreat," he muttered—"retreat while there is yet time. Perhaps I may manage to reach the end of this path again without encountering anyone; if so, I shall esteem myself fortunate."

He started to run, but quickly reduced his pace to a stealthy, cautious walk, for on the other side of the hedge—if he may so call it—he could hear the voices of those who were in search of him, and at times catch a glimpse of the lights they carried.

That every nook and corner in the castle gardens would be narrowly searched there could be no doubt, and if Tom King could only discover some place which had once been thoroughly examined, that would afford him the best chance of concealment.

This idea was passing through his mind, as, with long, stealthy, almost noiseless footsteps, he took his way towards the entrance of the path.

In a few moments he perceived it before him.

Impatient to extricate himself from so unpleasant a position, he increased his speed.

But the next moment, while scarcely able to repress a cry of vexation, he paused.

Round the corner came several persons.

Owing to the darkness, he could only perceive them indistinctly, and could not make out who and what they were.

Most probably, however, they formed part of the detachment of soldiers who were searching for him.

With rather rapid steps they came walking down the path, and now Tom found himself in a very critical position indeed.

If he remained where he was, or if he advanced, detection was quite certain, while, if he retreated and took refuge in the conservatory, it was very doubtful whether he would remain unfound.

This last course, however, was the only reasonable one that he could adopt, so, with all possible speed consistent with the requisite silence, he turned round, and retraced his steps.

"If I had only been a moment sooner," he murmured, "or if I had only known that I could not leave this path-way, how much better a chance I should have had of concealing myself! Now it seems almost impossible."

But the remembrance of the perilous position in which Dick Turpin stood, and that upon his exertions that night no doubt depended the captain's life, made a wonderful difference to his actions and to his daring also.

When he reached the door of the conservatory, he knew that speed was the principal thing required; therefore, with marvellous haste, he turned the knob and entered.

The door was furnished with a spring, and so closed of itself the moment he passed through it.

The atmosphere was warm and heavily laden with the perfume of a thousand rare and curious flowers, which had been brought there at great expense from every corner of the world.

He was much rejoiced to find that the conservatory was perfectly silent, and the peculiar stillness in the air told him that no human beings were at that moment beneath its roof.

Almost the first object on which his eyes rested was one that offered at least a chance of hiding himself.

It was a magnificent shrub, or, rather, a dwarf tree, for its height was a little under ten feet.

It was, however, from its tops to its roots one mass of long, shining leaves, much resembling blades of grass, only many hundred times as large.

Growing thus from the top, and falling quite down, they bore no slight resemblance to a fountain, and they were so thick and so close together, and overlapped one another to such a degree, that Tom felt confident they would hide him from the view of anyone unless the leaves were drawn aside.

There was little time for him to consider whether he should avail himself of this place of shelter, or whether he should seek for some other.

Already he fancied he could hear the approach of footsteps on the gravel-path without.

Hastily and yet carefully, so as not to disarrange anything, and so leave a trace of his presence, Tom pressed some of the long leaves apart, and, stepping up on to the huge wooden flower-pot in which the singular tree was growing, was in a moment completely lost to sight.

He turned round, settling himself into as easy and comfortable an attitude as he possibly could, for he knew how necessary it would be for him to remain quite still and without feeling the inclination to shift his position.

Scarcely had this been done than the door of the conservatory was opened.

Tom's heart beat rapidly and painfully.

He could scarcely bring himself to think that he was in anything like a secure position.

If he was properly searched for he would beyond a doubt be found.

But hearing that the low murmur of voices followed the opening of the door, and that the persons, whoever they might be, entered quietly, and not as he anticipated the soldiers would, Tom very carefully parted the leaves just sufficiently to allow him to take a glimpse of what was going on outside.

His first sensation was that of astonishment, followed quickly by delight, succeeded, however, by one of vexation.

The reason for this was that his eyes rested upon the form of his Majesty King George II.

Tom recognised him in a moment, for in happier times he had seen him frequently.

He noticed that the King looked a trifle older, and thinner, and careworn than he did when last he saw him, but that was all.

CHAPTER DCCCLXIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THREE MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.

WELL might Tom King be both astonished and delighted at the occurrence of such a fortunate incident as this.

Who would have thought that one of the persons he heard approaching was the King himself?

What more favourable opportunity than the present could he hope for to start forward and place the locket in his hand?

But his feelings, as we have said, quickly changed to vexation, for, walking a little behind the King, or, rather, at the side of him, came her Majesty the Queen.

Next came a young-looking man, with by no means a prepossessing countenance.

This was the King's eldest son, Frederick, and consequently the Prince of Wales.

Such an occasion as this was not, therefore, what Tom wanted.

He recollected the circumstances under which Dick had obtained the locket, and felt sure that the adventure would be one that the King would desire the Queen to know nothing of.

Tom was rather surprised to see the Prince of Wales thus alone with his parents, for it was well known that a coolness, if not absolute enmity, existed between them.

Tom King, however, was not allowed much time for making reflections and speculations—he was too much engrossed by the events that were taking place before him.

As soon as his Majesty had fairly entered the conservatory, he turned round, and, in a high, squeaking voice, said:

"Willis, close the door. You will understand we all wish to be alone—quite private. Go!"

The distinguished individual called Willis made a low obeisance and retired, closing the door of the conservatory carefully behind him.

The King and Queen stood close to each other, and the Prince of Wales, with his arms folded, a few paces from them.

The Queen was the first to speak.

Evidently by her manner she had all a mother's affection for this her eldest son, and it was also tolerably certain that it was not her fault that the feeling of ill-will existed.

"Now, Frederick," she said, "your father is here and am here. Good. He has promised to listen to what you have to say. Is it not so, George?" she added.

"Yes," said the King—"speak on!"

"Then, your Majesty," said the Prince of Wales, "I have to ask that we be once more friends. It is bad and

wrong of all of us, and it is a bad example to set the nation."

"Yes," interjected the Queen—"a very bad example indeed!"

"Frederick," said the King, sternly, "no one knows better than yourself that this is all your own doing and your own bringing on. I cannot close my eyes to the practices in which you have indulged—I will never close them; therefore, before we can be friends, you must consent to change your present mode of life."

"I am willing to obey you in all things reasonable," was the reply; "but I think you go too far—you pry too deeply into my concerns."

"No, no—I do not, Frederick," returned the King, with more tenderness of manner and tone than he had yet displayed. "But I remember what I was at your age, and now I am filled with regret and remorse for what I was. I see you treading the same downward, ruinous path, and I am anxious to save you the years of misery that I have passed."

The Prince was silent.

"You have around you," he continued, "a set of men whose names are loathed and execrated by the whole nation. While you continue to keep them, so to speak, as a body-guard around you, we cannot be friends, nor can you win the respect and good-will of the English nation."

The Prince was silent for a few moments, and the Queen added:

"Frederick, you hear the words just pronounced—you feel as well as I do that they are correct. Now comes the moment for you to decide. It is between us and the persons just alluded to that you have to choose, so which shall it be?"

At this moment there was an unusual disturbance just outside the conservatory.

The King uttered an ejaculation, and Tom King allowed the leaves to fall into their places, which he had held aside in order to watch the proceedings of the King.

He knew very well that the noise proceeded from the soldiers who were without, and who were desirous of searching in the conservatory for him.

Loud voices were heard, and then the door was gently opened.

The personage addressed as Willis just intruded his head.

"Your Majesty——" he began.

The King interrupted him with a snarling, impatient sound.

"Your Majesty, a detachment of the guard is without in search of——"

"Yah—bah! Shut the door! Begone! Did we not say we would not be disturbed?"

Thus admonished, Willis closed the door, and Tom heard him say:

"It's all very well for you to tell me that you have searched all through the gardens and can find no one, and that in consequence the man you are in search of is hidden here—I tell you it cannot be so! The King is there, and I have been watching ever since; but if you are not satisfied, wait till the King leaves; you can go in then and search to your hearts' content."

Some words were muttered by way of reply to this, but what they were Tom could not catch.

Turning his attention once more upon the royal party, he saw the Prince of Wales had stepped forward a pace or two, and was holding out his hand.

"Let there be a reconciliation!" he was saying. "My own folly I can see now only too plainly. Let us be good friends, as we should be, but do not seek to curb me too much; it is not my fault that I am impatient of the least control."

"Let it be so, Frederick," said the King, extending his hand—"let it be so, and let us rejoice that on this occasion you disobeyed me. When I heard you were in the saloon my anger was great; now, however, all has turned out well."

The Queen was quite overcome with joy at this result of the meeting; it was more—far more—than she had dared to expect.

"Come, George," she said, "let us return to the saloon; the sooner it is known that the misunderstanding between you and Frederick is cleared up the better it will be."

"No—no," said the King—"not this moment—not this moment! Leave me, both of you—I will follow soon—leave me, I say; I wish to be alone!"

The Queen knew her husband's nature too well to attempt to thwart him in any way, and therefore prepared to obey without another word.

The Prince drew her hand beneath his arm, and they left the conservatory together.

When they had gone, the King began to pace up and down with rapid strides.

There were signs of great vexation, remorse, and anguish on his countenance; but by what produced, who could tell?

Perhaps it was this unexpected reconciliation with his son that had affected him so deeply, or perhaps it was that some memory of the past came back to him, bringing with it nothing but misery and sadness.

So strange was the King's whole manner, and so well did his face portray the uneasiness of his mind, that Tom could not avoid gazing upon him for some time in silence.

"Well," he thought, "who would believe that that miserable, dejected-looking, prematurely old man is the King of England?"

Rousing himself from these thoughts, however, Tom suddenly recollected the purpose he had to accomplish.

Chance had favoured him to a degree that he had not dared to hope for.

The King was now alone, and what would be so easy as to step forth and confront him.

In his present mood, would he not be more likely to listen to his application and to be inclined to an act of mercy?

Surely yes.

There was only one fear.

That was, as soon as he caught sight of the intruder he would utter such a cry as would have the effect of calling his attendant, Willis, into the conservatory, when the highwayman's discovery would be inevitable.

That risk had to be run, and Tom made up his mind to delay no longer, for he could not tell what moment the King might take it into his head to leave.

Such a chance as this once lost would probably never be regained.

Watching his opportunity, then, he slowly and gently left his verdant hiding-place.

The King's back was towards him.

Concealed by some of the shrubs, Tom waited until he turned round in his restless walk and came past.

Then, holding the locket open in his hand, he stepped forward.

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing deeply, and speaking in a low, respectful voice—"will your Majesty deign to look at this?"

The King started, as well he might, at this unexpected intrusion.

His lips parted, as though he was about to give vent to that cry, the consequences of which were so much feared by Tom.

But just then his eyes fell upon the open locket, and immediately a strange and wondrous alteration overspread his features.

He stepped back a pace.

His lips opened wider, his eyes dilated, and he pressed one hand upon his forehead.

He made several gasping attempts to speak.

"What—what," he said, at last, in a hoarse whisper—"what—what is it that you hold before me? Take it away—take it away! Is it real or some delusion? Have I pondered over this event in my past life until my fancy has conjured up this relic? What—what—what—"

"Your Majesty," said Tom, in the same respectful voice, "it is no fancy, but reality. I have been charged to deliver the locket into your hands, and, at the peril of my life, I have done so."

While he spoke, Tom let the open locket fall into the King's outstretched hand.

CHAPTER DCCLXV.

TOM KING'S STRANGE INTERVIEW WITH HIS MAJESTY IN THE CONSERVATORY.

The King closed his hand convulsively, and then, in a changed voice, said:

"Who and what are you? How came you by this? Speak quickly—tell me all. Yet stay—follow me—this way—this way."

The King hastily strode towards the further end of the conservatory, and Tom wondered greatly at his mode for so doing.

But his wonder soon ceased when he perceived a very pretty rustic-looking seat placed there for the convenience of visitors.

On this the King sat, and, resting one of his elbows on the arm of it, supporting his head with his hand, he said:

"Now tell me, and as quickly as you can. Use no more words than you are absolutely compelled."

"Your Majesty," Tom began, "as you seem to know, that locket was sent as a token."

"Token—token of what? How came it in your possession?"

Tom reflected a moment; then decided that it would be best to let the King know the history of the locket, as this would be more likely to achieve his purpose.

"The lady," he said, "whose portrait is in that locket—"

Here the King started violently, and glanced all around, as if he expected some cave-dropper to be near.

"Hush—hush!" he cried. "Don't name that—don't name that—do not let any such words escape your lips."

His agitation was extreme.

"I will be careful, your Majesty. The lady, then, found herself in a situation of much difficulty and danger. Your Majesty may perhaps remember a certain letter, on the outside of which appears the stain of blood."

The King started again, and removed his hand from his face.

Tom was absolutely startled by the expression of it.

It was as white as marble.

Seeing that the King was struggling to speak, Tom remained silent, and at length his Majesty gasped forth:

"Who and what are you, knowing all these things, which I believed buried for ever in oblivion? Speak—explain yourself, I say!"

"I will do so if your Majesty will permit me," replied Tom, calmly. "But the letter of which I speak, and which, as you know full well, was highly prized by the lady, as it was necessary she should retain it in her possession—that letter, I say, was stolen from her, and was held by a certain nobleman, whose name perhaps I need not mention, who used it as a means of power over her, terrifying her into compliance with all his wishes."

The King groaned.

"Yes—yes," he said, "I know all that—all that! Proceed."

"Your Majesty, the lady felt that, at all risks and hazards, that letter must be re-obtained. How to perform such a difficult task as this she had not the remotest idea; but at last she thought of one who, by his daring deeds and open defiance of the law, seemed likely to suit her purpose. To this man she applied herself, and he undertook to obtain the missing document. That undertaking he fulfilled—the letter was returned, and he was told to name his own reward. He refused, however, to take anything, but at last the lady forced this locket into his hands, telling him to keep it carefully, and when in some great peril from which he could not extricate himself by other means, he was to send a faithful messenger to convey this locket and place it in your Majesty's own hand."

The King remained silent for some moments after Tom King had ceased speaking.

It was evident that he was deeply plunged in thought; but as to the nature of his reflections, Tom King could only give a guess.

Starting at length from his abstraction, as if only suddenly aware that Tom was present, he said:

"Then this man who obtained the letter is now in a position of danger?"

"He is, your Majesty. At this moment he lies in a cell in Newgate, upon a charge affecting his life, and if immediate measures are not taken he will be executed at Tyburn."

"Indeed!" said the King, musingly. "His name?"

"Dick Turpin."

Tom watched, with some anxiety, to observe the effect that the pronunciation of this name would have upon his Majesty.

He saw the King give a slight start of astonishment. Then he mechanically repeated his name.

That was all.

Looking scrutinisingly into Tom's countenance, he said:

"But you have not yet told me who you are. In what way are you connected with this matter? Scarcely you are no companion or associate of a desperado like Dick Turpin? Your appearance and mode of speech are those of a man of education, and one accustomed to a higher sphere of life. There is something too, in your countenance and in the tones of your voice that seems familiar. Where and when have I seen you before?"

These questions produced a most embarrassing feeling upon Tom King.

How to reply he scarcely knew.

But he saw the King was watching him closely, and he felt that it would be unwise and dangerous to tamper with him in any way, for upon his breath hung the captain's life.

"Circumstances," he said, "have made me what I am. It is scarcely possible, however, that your Majesty can have ever seen me before to-night; some accidental resemblance has misled you. But, to confess the truth, I am Dick Turpin's comrade and bosom friend, and ready at any moment to die, if by dying I could save him."

"You the comrade of a robber—a thief?"

"Your Majesty," replied Tom, "I have said it."

Little was it guessed how great was the amount of humiliation that Tom King felt at this moment.

Most forcibly was brought back to him the unhappy past, and the events which had conspired to make him what he then was.

The topic of conversation was painful, and could only become more so by being prolonged.

To Tom's great relief, the King's eyes happened just then to fall upon the locket, which still lay in his hand.

He started, as if he had suddenly recollected the business in hand.

"And this Dick Turpin is in Newgate, you say?" he resumed, in a different tone of voice. "Confound the fellow! there has been trouble enough to catch him, and now that he is safe in custody it seems the favour you require from me is a free pardon."

"That is it," said Tom, "if your Majesty will be so gracious. I leave it to you to decide whether the service of wresting that letter from Lord Spindelow is worthy of such a boon."

"It is—it is. But yet—yet I am so hampered and fettered by one and another, that I fear I cannot grant your request."

"Your Majesty?"

"It is so. I know how strong is the feeling of the ministers against this man—they would do all and everything to ensure his execution. Were I to interfere, such an outcry and bother would be made about it that I should know no further peace. No, no—it cannot be done."

"And must I take back that answer?" said Tom, in tones of the deepest disappointment and regret.

"Yes; and yet I do not ask you to abandon all hope—no, no, do not think so badly of me. I can be grateful, although it would not be prudent for me to grant a pardon; yet, by some other means, I may effect his liberation from Newgate—at any rate, his life shall be spared."

"Oh, your Majesty," said Tom, surprised beyond measure at this unexpected relief, "would that I could find words to express my gratitude!"

"Well, well—that will do—we will suppose them uttered. Now go—leave me. Rest assured your comrade is safe."

"I humbly take my leave," said Tom; "but yet, your Majesty's kindness emboldens me to make one more request."

"Say on."

"It is that you furnish me with some kind of passport or watchword, in order that I may leave the castle in safety. Your Majesty appears to have overlooked the fact that I have baffled the vigilance of all your officials."

sentinels, and domestics, and have found you alone. Had I been a conspirator and not so scrupulous as to whether I committed the crime of regicide, I should have had ample opportunity."

The King sprang to his feet.

Alarm was in his breast.

The very word "conspirator" had brought back to his mind all the attempts which had been made to hurl him from the throne.

His dread of the Jacobites was something most intense.

"I only mention these facts," said Tom, "in order to show you that it will be necessary for me to have some kind of passport when I leave. The soldiers, knowing an intruder is in the castle, have searched in all directions, and, no doubt, as soon as I leave this conservatory, I shall be pounced on."

"But suppose," said the King, "that I leave you to get away again by your own stratagem?"

"Then, your Majesty, I can do no more than try my best. You have given me your assurance that my comrade's life is safe. If I should perish in my endeavours to escape, I shall not care, because I shall know that I have purchased his safety with my life."

The King could not avoid gazing upon the highwayman with admiration.

Such devotion as this was rare indeed.

It made him sigh and wish that he had attached to his own person people who would be as staunch and true, instead of the hollow-hearted set by whom he was surrounded, and whose sole aim was their own aggrandisement.

But events had made the King suspicious.

He fancied that perhaps this was only bravado on Tom's part.

At any rate, he resolved to put him to the test.

"You presume too much," he said. "I have already granted one request—let that suffice. Be satisfied that you gained an audience of me in spite of all my retinue. Now let us see whether you will be equally successful in returning."

"Your Majesty," said Tom, "I take my leave. My best thanks are yours for having promised to save my comrade's life. As for myself, I shall do my best to gain my way to liberty. If I fail, it will matter little; existence has but few charms for me, and when I am gone there will not be many to regret my loss, and even by them I shall soon be forgotten."

While thus speaking, Tom bowed low, and turning quickly round, strode towards the door of the conservatory.

CHAPTER DCCLXVI.

TOM KING ENDEAVOURS TO REJOIN CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

Tom walked on with a steady and unflinching step, wondering much at the sudden alteration in the King's manner.

It was not until his hand was actually on the fastening of the door of the conservatory that the King, in a sharp, commanding voice, cried:

"Halt!"

Tom stopped instantly, and turned round.

He saw the King standing at the further end, and beckoning him to approach.

"It was merely to make a trial of you," said the King, as soon as he neared him. "I can see now that you were fully in earnest, and know henceforth that the King of England can appreciate bravery and devotion wherever he may find it—in the person of a highwayman. Here, Willis, I say!"

The door opened immediately in response to the call, and Willis appeared.

"You will escort this gentleman to the gates of the castle," said the King, "and after that return to me."

Willis looked surprised, as well he might, at finding someone in the conservatory in conversation with the King.

But he was too well-bred to utter a word.

Merely bowing, he made a sign to Tom to follow him.

The King in the meanwhile, sank down again upon the little rustic seat in an attitude of great dejection.

Recollections of the past came thronging thickly into his mind—recollections painful and unpleasant; but yet, strive as he would, he could not banish them.

With a very different kind of feeling, Tom King followed Willis from the conservatory.

His heart was elate with hope, and he stepped briskly forward.

Not only was his own escape from Windsor Castle ensured, but he had the King's word that the captain should be liberated.

Well might he rejoice then, and well might he felicitate himself upon the success that had attended him in his efforts.

Looking back, he could scarcely believe what had occurred.

It seemed impossible that fortune could have so favoured him.

When at a safe distance from the conservatory, Willis turned round towards Tom, and, with preparatory cough, said:

"Excuse me, sir, if I asked by what means you gained the conservatory."

"Secret service," said Tom King.

Willis stared.

"You do not understand me," he said, in a louder voice. "How did you gain the conservatory?"

"Secret service," said Tom, in the same calm, even tones as before.

Willis stamped his foot impatiently.

"I insist upon knowing, sir! My vigilance is at stake. Will you or will you not answer my question?"

"I have answered it."

"But I say that is no answer."

"Then," returned Tom, as coolly as ever, "I can give you no other, so obey his Majesty's command by showing me out with the least possible delay."

Willis bit his lip, and he looked at Tom with a revengeful scowl.

There is no doubt that if he had the opportunity he would certainly do him some serious injury.

In fact, Willis was never satisfied until he had pried into every domestic matter of the King's; and in this strange, unaccountable interview he snuffed out some family secret with the details of which he wished to make himself familiar.

But in Tom King he had the wrong person to deal with.

Threats and cajolery would be alike unavailing.

Of course, Willis was allowed to go wherever he chose unquestioned, and as it was seen that Tom was under his immediate guidance and protection, no effort was made to stop him.

Tom, however, was full of impatience once more to get beneath the open sky.

He had not forgotten the perilous position in which he had left his two companions, and he was well aware that, in their devotion to himself, they would go to any length—run any risk—in order to cover his retreat.

Therefore it was that he wished to make his way round to that particular part of the castle where he had left them, and to let them know that all was well.

Whether the two hours had elapsed, or whether a longer period had gone by, he could not tell.

He had omitted to take notice of the time.

To judge by events, his stay in the castle must altogether have been of considerable duration.

As he walked on, Tom rightly conjectured that there must be many exits from the castle, and therefore requested to be led out as near as possible to the garden.

Willis made no reply to this request, however, but marched on.

Some slight revenge, however, he felt was now within his reach.

Evidently Tom was unacquainted with the interior of the castle, and therefore Willis led him to the gateway furthest from the place he wished to reach.

Just as he passed beneath the portal, he said:

"Turn to your left, and walk on. In two minutes you will be there."

Not suspecting any deception, Tom followed these directions; but after walking for a long time, he could not come in sight of one of the objects that in his approach to the castle he had noted down as landmarks.

There was no resource, however, but to keep walking on and on, trusting to arrive in a short time.

But his patience was destined to be put to a severe trial, and before he had gone much further, he guessed the nature of the trick that had been played him.

But so delighted was he at the success he had met with, that he was inclined to laugh at any bit of spite of this sort, so walked steadily, knowing that if he made a complete circuit of the castle that he must inevitably come to the point he wished to reach.

His only uneasiness was on behalf of his companions. He wondered how they would fare when the time came for a change of guard.

Windsor Castle, however, was greater in circumference than Tom had anticipated; and owing to occasional detours that he was compelled to make, it took him upwards of an hour to reach the garden wall.

Keeping under the shadow of the trees as before, he now approached with the utmost caution.

Sentinels were pacing up and down as before; and at last the front of the identical sentry-box, the top of which he had mounted, was reached.

Near to this he could perceive the figure of a man was standing.

He was clad in soldier's uniform; but whether it was Claude that he beheld, or a veritable sentinel, Tom King could not tell, the obscurity was so profound.

He resolved to wait a little while, and, if possible, to creep a little closer, in order to be able to form a better idea.

He watched the opportunity when the soldier, resuming his march, turned the angle of the wall, and was for a few moments, out of sight.

Anxiously he waited for the sentinel to reappear. At length he came into sight.

Shielding his eyes with his hands, Tom looked at him earnestly and scrutinisingly; then, after a moment, shook his head, as he muttered:

"No—no; it's not Claude, nor Jack either. Where on earth can they be? What has happened during my absence?"

These were questions that Tom King could not answer.

But leaving him in doubt, we will revert for a few moments to the proceedings of his comrades.

CHAPTER DCCCLXVII.

SHOWS HOW CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISPOSE OF THE SENTINEL.

No sooner had Tom King leaped over the wall in the manner described than Sixteen-String Jack took hold of the sentinel as he lay helpless upon the ground, and dragged him towards the sentry-box.

With some difficulty he succeeded in forcing him into it, Claude Duval, in the meanwhile, performing the part of sentinel to great perfection.

It was clear that he had not yet forgotten his military training, and it would have required a keen eye indeed to detect the imposition.

Sixteen-String Jack contented himself with hiding in the shadow of the sentry-box.

Here he believed he should be quite out of sight, and also in such a position as to render immediate aid to Tom King should he require it.

And so, without the occurrence of any incident to break the dull monotony of his duty, Claude Duval paced up and down outside the wall, pausing occasionally to exchange a few whispered words with his companion.

The time passed on but slowly, by no means so rapidly as with Tom, who was actively engaged during the whole time.

At length a tremendous uproar was heard, and they could only come to one conclusion respecting it, which was that Tom King had been discovered as an intruder in the castle, and that close search was being made after him.

Claude stopped a moment near the sentry-box, and, resting on his firearm, said:

"Tom is discovered, Jack, depend upon it. Now, then, what are we to do?"

"Why, nothing that I can see, except to remain here in readiness to assist him when he appears. Rely upon it he will make his way direct to this point, not only from

his desire to rejoin us, but also because the horses are here."

"I wish I could see over the top of the wall, nevertheless," said Claude.

"Be persuaded by me," said Jack, "and don't attempt it. You would be seen almost to a certainty, while ten to one if you could make out what was going on."

To stay longer was imprudent, so Claude marched off again, feeling very uneasy, and yet being all the time on the alert.

Time passed, and Tom did not appear. Then suddenly they heard the regular tapping of a drum, the same sound that they had heard a short time before.

"The time is up," said Claude, halting again; "the guard is about to be changed. Now what on earth shall we do?"

Jack was puzzled.

"I am afraid Tom is captured," he said; "and if he is, we shall only run our own necks into the noose by attempting to rescue him."

"I suppose so," was the answer; "and yet that does not reconcile one to abandoning him to his fate."

"It certainly does not; but be quick and decide before the soldiers appear in sight. It will not do to remain here."

"That is certain," said Claude, hastily stripping off the soldier's coat—"detection would be certain."

"And it will be now," said Jack, "for the soldiers, when they arrive here and find their comrade in this condition, will raise an immediate alarm."

"Let us look at him," said Claude, "and see what condition he is in by now."

He stepped out of the sentry-box and went close up to the soldier.

He was in a peculiarly uncomfortable position. Claude shook him.

But he took no notice.

"I believe he is insensible," he whispered. "If he is, we can manage it."

"How—how?"

"I cannot stay to tell you. Watch my actions—that must suffice."

Quick as thought, Claude dragged the sentinel out of the box, and then found his conjecture to be verified.

The man was indeed insensible.

His next proceeding was with great rapidity to rid him of the ropes by which he was secured, and to take the gag out of his mouth.

As soon as Jack saw what his comrade was about he assisted him, and the fragments were thrown over the wall.

Then, with a great deal of difficulty, the sentinel's coat was put on, and his musket placed beside him.

In his pocket Claude carried a small case of brandy.

This he produced, and poured a quantity of it into the man's mouth, who made a convulsive attempt to swallow it.

"That will do," he cried. "Now, Jack, follow me with all speed. When they come, ten to one if the guard don't take him to be dead drunk."

As noiselessly as shadows the highwaymen departed, concealing themselves once more in the trees.

Here they remained to watch what would happen next. On came the little troop of soldiers, just as they had seen them on the preceding occasion.

At length they stopped opposite the sentry-box, upon which the highwaymen's attention was fixed.

The sentinel, who was now beginning to recover his consciousness, was sitting on the ground, with his back against the sentry-box.

"Hullo!" the highwaymen heard a gruff voice say, and which doubtless proceeded from the officer in command—"hullo! what's this? Why, d—n me if he is not drunk! Wake him up there, will you, some of you?"

The soldiers gathered round their companion and shook him violently.

The odour of the brandy was very powerful, and made itself apparent to all.

"He is drunk," they cried. "Can't you smell the brandy? Well, who would have thought of this?"

"There'll be a row about it," said another voice.

"Silence!" cried the officer. "Get him up and make him a prisoner."



[TOM KING TAKES THE ROYAL LETTER-BAG TO NEWGATE.]

Not without a great deal of trouble the sentinel was got upon his feet.

His comrades, enjoying the sport, shook him about furiously.

Rough as these means were, yet the man began to recover his senses rapidly, and he gazed around him with a stupefied, bewildered expression.

"Aha, my fine fellow," said the officer, "you will pay dearly for this; it is no joke for one of the King's guard to be found dead drunk and asleep at his post."

"Dead drunk" ejaculated the sentinel; "who says I'm drunk?"

"Why, I do," answered the officer.

"I will take my oath," said the man, "I have not had a drop to drink to-night."

"You insolent rascal!" was the answer. "Do you mean to call me a liar? Why, you stink now of brandy

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to such a degree that it is scarcely possible to come near you!"

More bewildered than ever, the sentinel licked his lips, and as he did so he tasted the brandy, which, of course, increased his bewilderment considerably.

All at once, however, the recollection of what had taken place came over him.

"I will tell you all," he said—"I will confess all. I am not drunk, but—"

"Silence!" cried the officer. "If you say another word I will make it all the worse for you! Silence, I say, and don't palter with me any more!"

"But let me speak—it is most important!"

"Will you be silent?" said the officer. "Now, then, —attention—right about—quick march!"

The troop of soldiers marched on, and were quickly lost to sight.

During the occurrence of this scene, Claude and Jack remained profoundly silent, nor did they venture to speak until the sentinel, having commenced his duty of pacing up and down, had turned the angle of the wall. "Now," said Claude, "if Tom will only quickly make his appearance all will be well."

"He must be quick," was the reply, "for although the soldier has been hustled off at present, yet, depend upon it, before long he will make his story known, and then a regular alarm will be raised."

"True," was the answer. "I would give much to know how Tom has succeeded in his attempt to obtain an audience of the King. I am afraid the chance is lost, and that if Dick is liberated it will be by his and our own exertions."

CHAPTER DCCCLXVIII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HAVE SOME DOUBTS AS TO THE GOOD FAITH OF THE KING.

"I FEAR so too," replied Sixteen-String Jack; "but we will wait here till daybreak in the hope that Tom will return. Rely upon it, if he does come back, he will make direct for this point, because his horse is here."

"Yes, we will wait," said Claude; "it is not likely that we will abandon him."

And so the time passed on.

So firmly impressed were both the highwaymen with the notion that Tom King would make his appearance over the wall, that they paid but slight attention to any noises they might hear either to the left or right of them.

Consequently they were unaware of Tom's approach until he was almost upon them.

"Claude—Jack," he said, in a low tone—"speak—where are you?"

"Tom, is it you?"

"Yes, I am here, safe and sound."

His comrades pressed round him eagerly.

"Have you succeeded?" they asked, with breathless anxiety—"have you succeeded?"

"I have," said Tom, with a conscious triumph. "I have seen the King and had an interview with him, and he has given his word that Dick shall be set at liberty."

Claude and Jack threw their hats in the air, and in a faint whisper said "Hurrah!"

But for the contiguity of the sentinels, the cheer would have been a lusty one; but prudence restrained them.

"Mount!" said Claude. "Let us mount and gallop back; such good tidings as these cannot be communicated too quickly. We had just resigned ourselves to despair when you appeared."

The highwaymen mounted their horses with all speed, and turned their faces homeward.

Tom found he should get no peace until he had told his two companions all that had happened to him after his daring jump over the wall.

They listened with breathless interest, and at last Claude said:

"And that, I suppose, is all we shall ever hear of this mysterious locknet. What we know suggests a great deal more; and yet we may draw our own conclusions, and still be very far from the mark."

"Nothing more likely," said Tom; "but yet, after all, we may obtain some further intelligence. But, either way, it does not much matter, now that our end is obtained."

Taking the same route as before, the highwaymen galloped at full speed back to the Three Spiders Inn. They paused only once on the journey, and yet, in spite of all their exertions, it was fairly daybreak before the plantation was reached.

They looked up anxiously at the little window, hoping to catch sight of the signal-light.

But it was not there.

Such being the case, they were afraid to make any further movement.

Chafing with impatience, more than half an hour elapsed, and then upon the hard road in front of the inn they heard the clatter of horses' feet.

Listening intently, they soon found that some persons or other were taking their departure, for the sound grew gradually less and less distinct.

Shortly afterwards the little door in the stable was opened, and Tom Davis crossed its threshold.

The highwaymen advanced towards him instantly.

"Is all well?" they asked.

"Yes, all's well now; but only a few moments ago the officers were here."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again. I really thought they were satisfied; however, on this occasion, as you were all absent, and as I knew there was nothing that could betray me, I allowed them to search everywhere, and a most rigid search it has been. Of course," he added, "they discovered nothing."

"Well, then," said Claude, "I hope this is the last we shall have of these visits. Surely they must have some strong suspicion, or they would not be so frequently repeated."

"That's my own fear," returned Tom. "I can't understand their pertinacity; but we have only to be cautious, and then all will be well."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't know that," he said; "they may pounce upon us in an unfortunate moment, and then there will be an end to our remaining here."

"Well, well—we will leave that. Tell me first how you have succeeded in your enterprise?"

"Better than we expected."

"Have you seen the King?"

"I have."

"Then," ejaculated Tom Davis, "I shall never consider anything impossible again. Had I been asked what there was that no one could perform, I should have said, obtain an audience of the King."

"Well, I have done it, and with less difficulty than you imagine. Not only that, he has given his word that Dick shall be set free."

Tom Davis gave a shout, and then he exclaimed:

"I am glad to hear it—heartily glad to hear it; for I have just received intelligence that has filled me with uneasiness."

"Indeed? Does it concern Dick?"

"It does. But come in; let us close the stable door, and while we are seeing to the horses we can talk it over."

This was done, and as soon as they were fairly beneath the roof of the stable, Tom Davis said:

"The officers brought me word that the authorities, fearing some rescue or escape, have determined to push things on to the utmost. No time has been lost anywhere, and, in order that they may make sure of the execution taking place without delay, the old warrant sent for Dick has been endorsed, and all preparations have been made, so that his execution is fixed to take place at noon to-morrow."

"No matter," said Tom King—"no matter. If any faith is to be placed in the King's word, Dick will be free long before then, and the authorities will be again disappointed."

"I trust so," said Tom Davis; "but you must tell me some more of the particulars. Do you think there is that dependence to be placed on the King's word? After you have gone, is there not the fear that he may be influenced by some of his ministers to break his word?"

"I trust not," returned Tom King—"I think not; but should he be weak enough to be persuaded, his conduct will be base in the extreme."

"There cannot be two opinions about that," returned Tom Davis; "but, then, I have often heard that the King is weak and vacillating. How much better it would have been could you have procured some document from him in confirmation of his promise."

"It would, truly," replied Tom King; "but, then, I was afraid to push him too far. I thought I had been extremely successful in obtaining his word."

"And that ought to be sufficient," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and don't let us meet trouble half-way."

"I am the last to do that," returned Davis, "only we ought not to lose sight of any consideration."

"You are right," said Tom King; "but let us go in now. Above all, attend to this—let no word of doubt reach Mand's ears."

"Certainly not—it would be unwise and cruel to a degree."

With these words, the horses having been made com-

fortable, the three highwaymen followed Tom Davis into the inn.

They found Mand pale and tearful, anxiously watching and wishing for their return.

She sprang forward as soon as they crossed the threshold, and in imploring accents said:

"Tell me—oh, tell me the result of your efforts! Tell me in a word. Do not keep me longer in suspense—it has half killed me already."

"I will not," said Tom, cheerfully. "I have seen the King—the locket has had its expected effect, and he has given me his promise that Dick shall be liberated without delay."

With an hysterical cry, Mand burst into tears.

That intelligence was indeed a relief to her overfraught heart.

Those tears, however, quickly passed away, and, turning a smiling countenance towards Tom King, she said:

"When—oh, when may we expect him?"

"Soon, I should think—very soon. The King no doubt would despatch a messenger at once, and Dick would be set free on his arrival. Surely we may expect to see him some time between this and nightfall."

This was encouraging indeed, and Mand, having learned all the particulars, hastened to the front of the inn, and took up her position at a window which commanded the best view of the lane.

Here she remained during the whole of the day, refusing to move.

This act of hers enabled the highwaymen and Tom Davis to speak freely on the subject that was uppermost in their minds.

And, as the day slowly wore on, it was strange to see how much the doubts felt by all increased.

"If the time was not so fearfully short," said Claude Duval, "it would not so much matter; but really, if anything should go wrong, it leaves us no chance whatever to use our own exertions. Are you sure, Davis," he asked, for about the twentieth time, "that the execution is appointed for to-morrow?"

"Perfectly certain," was the answer. "I have the best authority for the statement."

"Well, comrades," cried Sixteen-String Jack, "with your permission, I will tell you what we will do."

"What?"

"Remain here until nightfall; then, if Dick does not make his appearance, we will mount our horses and ride towards London. Should he be returning, we shall meet him; and should we ascertain that no messenger has been sent, we will try what we can do ourselves."

After some discussion, this course of action was resolved upon.

Never, perhaps, had a day gone by so tediously as that.

They all sat watching the little Dutch clock in the inn kitchen, as its hands moved slowly round the dial-plate.

It would have been better could they have slept; but in the excited condition of their minds slumber was impossible.

When it was getting towards sunset, they, all anxious to be doing something, rose from their seats and made their way to the stables.

Here they occupied themselves in attending to their horses, and just as twilight was deepening into night they put on the saddles and bridles.

Up to that moment, nothing whatever had been seen or heard of Dick, and therefore they might justly feel afraid that things were not going right.

"I can wait no longer," said Tom King. "Come on, comrades. We will ride slowly towards London, and I hope before we have gone far we shall be lucky enough to meet him."

"Most heartily do I echo that wish," said Tom Davis. "Take my advice, and be prepared at all points. Now that you are about to depart, I don't hesitate to say that from the first I had but slight faith in the King's word, and now I might go the length of telling you that I feel none at all. In a moment and under the circumstances you describe, he may have given you the promise, but after-reflection has caused him to alter his mind. It is my humble opinion that if Dick Turpin is to be liberated from Newgate to-night, it will be by your exertions, and yours only."

"Well, we shall see," said Tom King. "Come on, comrades. When once we are in motion we shall do away with the dreadful sensation of suspense that we have been suffering so long. Come on—come on!"

CHAPTER DCCCLXIX.

RELATES HOW DICK TURPIN PASSED THE DAY PREVIOUS TO THE ONE APPOINTED FOR HIS EXECUTION.

THERE WAS ONE to whom the minutes of that day lagged quite as slowly as to Tom Davis and the highwaymen, and that one, as may be guessed, was no other than Dick Turpin, in his comfortless cell in Newgate.

The tempting breakfast that had been brought him by the friendly jailer he left untouched; and when, shortly afterwards, the jailer came in, he exclaimed:

"Why, captain, you have had nothing at all. This looks bad. How is it?"

"I am sick at heart," said Turpin—"I am full of uneasiness and suspense. Can you not contrive to leave the prison soon, and slip off to Drury Lane? Ten to one you will learn something there that will give me ease."

"I will try my very best, captain—rest assured of that. I hope things are all going right with you, because—"

"Because what?"

"Why, I don't like to say it; but yet perhaps I had better tell you that they are making every preparation for turning you off to-morrow."

"Are they indeed?"

"Yes, they are, and it's talked of in the prison as a thing of course, for, having given your word not to make the attempt to escape, they feel certain that you must perish."

"Well, we shall see," said Dick, whose spirits were by no means raised by this intelligence—"we shall see shortly. In the meantime, go to Drury Lane. I shall know better how to act when you return."

"I will, captain; but though I am a bit of a favourite with the Governor, yet I cannot do exactly as I like. No doubt I shall slip off soon."

With these words, the jailer left, and Dick was once more in solitude.

He tried to keep himself calm.

But vainly. He would not have been human had he not felt the great peril of his situation.

His life, it might be said, hung merely upon a thread.

Had the day of his execution been appointed for that day week instead of the morrow, he would have felt perfectly indifferent, because if the King did not aid him he would then have a chance of using his own powers and profiting by the assistance of his comrades.

While at the height of his suspense, he heard the muttering of voices outside his cell.

Then the fastenings were withdrawn, and the door flung open upon his hinges.

Dick started forward with impatient anxiousness, for he fully expected it was the friendly jailer who had returned with welcome intelligence.

What was his disappointment, then, to perceive that it was a total stranger—a slim little man, wearing spectacles and a very dirty peruke?

To his intense astonishment, this man, with extended hand, ran forward and cried:

"My dear sir, this is really a pleasure—I am rejoiced to see you! Preserve that expression—pray preserve that expression, and it will be first-rate."

Dick instinctively shrank back from the stranger's advances, and put up his arm in a defensive attitude, as if to shield himself from the attack of a foe.

What on earth the dirty, ugly little man could mean he could not tell.

Casting his eyes towards the door, he saw that one of the men on guard outside had thrust in something square, carefully wrapped up in paper.

Along with it came a small oblong box, and what appeared to be three pieces of wood strapped together.

It was still in the dark as to the stranger's intentions.

But he was not long suffered to be so.

"My dear sir," he said again, "just look here. Wait a moment. It is a pleasure, I am sure—a very great pleasure. There!"

With nervous haste he picked up the three pieces of wood, unstrapped them, and placed them on the floor in a

triangular sition, and then Dick saw before him a painter's easel.

But before he could make any remark or recover from the state of surprise into which he had been thrown the stranger hastily stripped off the paper from the square parcel, and disclosed a piece of canvas stretched on a frame, all ready for painting upon.

This he placed upon the easel, and with the same rapidity of movement opened the box, and took therefrom a palette and some brushes.

"There, my dear sir, that's it—that's it! Only a few moments in that position, and I shall be done. I am wonderfully rapid, I assure you—not an R.A. as yet, but soon to be, I hope. There—there!"

While he spoke, the painter—for such he evidently was—made many flourishes with his brushes, but before he could make many lines Dick stepped forward.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "if I inquire the meaning of this extraordinary intrusion. If I have not asked this before, it is simply because I have been taken so utterly by surprise."

"Intrusion?" said the painter. "Oh, no intrusion, I assure you! Return to your former attitude—let me entreat you to return to it, and remain so; then, in the meanwhile, I will give you every information you wish."

"No," said Dick. "I wish to know distinctly, first of all, what it is that you intend to do."

"Why, my good sir, to immortalise you. I am going to paint your portrait."

"Indeed! At whose wish?"

"My own—my own, sir—my own entirely. The idea struck me, and then I said to myself, 'Septimus Gibbon, your fortune is made.'"

"But keep to the point," said Dick. "Believe me, I am not in the humour to-day for a long conversation."

"I am at the point now, my dear sir—I have just reached it. I thought to myself, I would paint your portrait. By that means, I should not only immortalise you but achieve never-ending fame myself. That's my idea. So I went to my uncle, the sheriff, and he, with his usual kindness, gave me permission to enter your cell. So here I am, you see, and all you have to do is to stand for half an hour or so, and everything will be done."

"But stop a moment," said Dick. "It seems to me that you have made one little omission."

"An omission? And pray, my dear sir, what may that be?"

"Why, this: You have asked leave of the sheriff, but you have forgotten to ask leave of me."

"Oh, a needless piece of ceremony altogether," said the painter; "but if you wish it, I will be quite formal."

"No, no," said Dick. "In a word, understand me that I firmly and most positively refuse to give my consent. You shall not paint my portrait."

"But, my dear sir, reflect."

"I have reflected already. Begone! Trouble me no more!"

The painter looked rather abashed, and then a bright thought struck him.

Getting one of his brushes ready prepared, and standing close to his easel, he said, with a slowness of utterance that contrasted remarkably with his former glibness of speech:

"My dear sir, I am exceedingly sorry that I should have offended you. I never dreamt for a moment but that you would willingly give your consent to my painting your portrait. However, I find you have an objection, and therefore, when I have tendered you my sincere apologies for the intrusion I trust you will accept them, and I will depart."

While slowly speaking these words, the painter glanced continually from Dick to his canvas, and worked busily with the brush.

Dick guessed what he was about, and just as he had finished his speech, stepped forward.

Mr. Septimus Gibbon, as he called himself, endeavoured to cover over what he had been doing with his palette.

But Dick knocked it impatiently aside with so much impatience, that it slipped from the painter's hand, and falling to the floor of the cell, was broken into a thousand pieces.

"Why, you deceitful rascal," said Dick, the moment his eye fell upon the canvas; "while pretending to talk

to me as you did, and to offer your apologies, you have actually drawn the outlines of my face! You could have walked off, and would have finished the portrait at your leisure. What do you mean by it?"

"My dear sir," stammered the painter, "I—I—"

"I suppose you thought I should not see it?" said Dick, fiercely, and seizing hold of the canvas while he spoke.

"Now, my dear sir, don't—pray don't touch it! Let me entreat you not to touch it!"

But paying no attention whatever to his words, Dick lifted the frame from the easel, and commenced an immediate attack with it upon the painter.

He banged him most lustily over the head with it, until, at length, after one blow stronger than the rest, the canvas gave way, and the painter's head passed through it.

The effect was, that he stood with rather a ridiculous-looking collar round his neck.

His cries, however, had reached the ears of the turnkeys outside, and they had hastily thrown open the door.

When they saw what had occurred, however, they could not forbear from laughing.

"There," said Dick, "be off—be off, will you, at once! You will find this rather harder than the rest, so I advise you to begone!"

He seized hold of the easel as he spoke, and the painter, fearing a blow with it, made a rush to the door of the cell, pulling frantically at the frame round his neck, and endeavouring to free himself of his disagreeable encumbrance.

But his alarm and excitement prevented him from doing the very thing that he wished, so he tugged and tugged in vain.

Dick was just then in the humour to be angry with anybody or anything, and it was rather a relief to him than otherwise that the painter should have made his disappearance just then.

After his departure, he flung all his apparatus out into the corridor, and, addressing the turnkeys, said:

"Where is the Governor? Send for him; I want to see him at once!"

The turnkeys winked their eyes at each other.

It was a rare joke for a prisoner to demand an interview with the Governor of the prison.

"Do you hear what I say?" roared Turpin.

"Yes, we hears, captain," was the reply; "only we are afraid he will not come."

"Well, then," said Dick, "just tell him from me that if I have another intrusion of this kind I shall consider the compact between us at an end."

The turnkeys promised obedience, and withdrew, carefully fastening the door after them.

"Confound his impudence!" said Dick, still fuming. "I wish I had hit him a little harder, that's all!"

It was something, nevertheless, to be diverted from the contemplation of his position; and by the time he had succeeded in regaining his usual calmness the door was again opened, and the friendly jailer appeared.

Before he spoke, Dick could tell by the expression of his countenance that he had nothing particular to communicate.

"Well," he said, in a whisper, as soon as it was prudent to address him, "have you been?"

"I have, captain."

"And what is the result?"

"I have seen old Matthew."

"Well?"

"But he knows nothing. Since Davis took his departure yesterday, he has not seen or heard anything of him or his companions."

"That is strange," said Dick—"very strange; but perhaps he will hear shortly. When the day is further advanced, go again."

"All right, captain. And, now, what would you like for dinner?"

"Don't trouble me about dinner. I am in no humour to touch a mouthful."

"Well, captain, you may be right, but I don't think you are. You ought to make the best you can of matters, and eat heartily while you have the chance."

"But who could eat in such a place as this?" said Dick, glancing around him. "No, no; my appetite has gone, and I loathe the very sight of food."

"It is bad, captain," said the jailer, shaking his head—"very bad. I hope you will soon be better. You want some intelligence of your friends, and if it is to be procured, I will obtain it."

"I know you will," said Dick, shaking him by the hand. "I shall always be deeply indebted to you."

"No, no; quite the reverse."

"But I say yes."

A few more unimportant words were exchanged, and then the jailer again left, promising to pay another visit as soon as he should be successful in getting leave of absence.

He had not been absent more than five minutes before the door was again opened.

"Another intrusion!" thought Dick, this time growing angry in earnest.

He glanced towards the doorway.

He saw that it was the Ordinary, who was attired in full canonicals, and carried a couple of books under his arm.

"Unhappy man," he said, in a whining tone, and with his eyes so turned up to the ceiling of the cell that only the whites were visible—"unhappy man, I have come to pass a few hours with you in meditation and prayer!"

"Thank you," said Dick. "I am much obliged to you, but I prefer to be alone."

"A hardened sinner," said the Ordinary, with a grin—"a hardened sinner, yet he may be converted to the ways of grace."

"It strikes me," replied Dick, "that I am by no means so bad as you imagine; but I think that a man in my position should, at least, have a few little privileges accorded to him, and one of them should be that he should please himself whether he remained alone, or whether he was intruded upon."

"Worse and worse!" said the chaplain. "Do you know, unhappy man, that in twelve hours from this you will be standing on the brink of eternity?"

"I do not know it," said Dick, firmly.

"Well, then, it is my unhappy duty to inform you of it. In twelve hours, at the most, you will be no more."

"It's a mistake," said Dick—"quite a mistake."

"No, I assure you it is not. Every preparation has been made by the officials connected with the prison. Your execution is appointed to take place at noon to-morrow, and, therefore, I have come to prepare you for your approaching inevitable fate."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," replied Dick, "but believe me when I say that it is quite unnecessary."

"Unnecessary?"

"Yes. Do not misunderstand me; you are labouring under a great mistake. I shall not be executed to-morrow, and therefore I stand in no need of your spiritual consolation and preparation."

"It is a vain hope," said the Ordinary—"a vain, delusive hope, and let me entreat you to cast it from you."

"It is a hope that will be realised," said Dick, "and therefore let me entreat you to grant me the poor favour of leaving me by myself for a short time."

"I will," said the chaplain, "but only for a short time. I trust reflection will soon assert its sway—then I will return. May your heart be softened, and may you be brought to a proper knowledge of your position!"

Dick was silent, for he wished the reverend gentleman to leave at once.

He did so.

The turnkeys opened the door, and Dick was once more left alone.

His uneasiness had now reached a fearful pitch.

He paced restlessly up and down his cell.

"Can it be," he muttered to himself—"can it be that everything has gone wrong, and that I am doomed at last to perish? No, no, I will not think that—not even when the cap is drawn over my face and the noose adjusted round my neck; even then I will not despair, but place faith in the exertions of my comrades."

In spite of this, however, Dick felt that it would be no trifling relief could he but be freed from his present state of suspense.

He could tell that the day was gradually drawing in and that night was approaching.

Yet he saw nothing of the friendly jailer; in fact, it was not until the interior of the cell was quite dark—

just, indeed, about the same time when the highwaymen were setting out from the inn—that the door was once again opened, and Dick's eyes were gladdened by the sight of his friend.

But there was no hope or encouragement to be gleaned from the expression of his countenance.

"You have bad news," said Dick. "Come, speak out at once—the sooner it is over the better."

"Not bad news," said the man, "without you call no news bad news."

"Well, speak—do not keep me waiting."

"Well, captain, I have just come back from Drury Lane. I have seen old Matthew."

"And what does he say?"

"He says but little. He is in a state of great uneasiness. He is afraid something has gone wrong somewhere, and did not hesitate to say so."

"He has not seen or heard from Davis?"

"Not a word of any kind."

"How strange!"

"That is what he says. He calls it very strange—in fact, is unable to account for it. Had all gone well, you should by this time have been set at liberty."

"And what is his advice?"

"He said he was unable to offer any, except that, if he stood in your position, he should trust to no one but himself."

"He means, endeavour to escape?"

"Yes."

"But how short is the time!" said Dick. "What earthly chance have I?"

The jailer shrugged his shoulders.

"A very poor chance, I am afraid, captain, for I can assure you that never since this prison has been built has there been such close and observant guard kept all around it. The men are all on the alert, and it would be totally impossible for any person to leave Newgate at any point unseen. How you are to escape under these circumstances passes my comprehension."

"Well, well," said Dick, "leave me—I should like to be alone, and to think over my position as best I may."

"Then I will go, captain. Are you sure you want nothing?"

"Nothing whatever."

With a glance, plainly of pity and regret, the turnkey left the cell.

As soon as he had departed, Dick sank down upon the chair, and, clasping his hands over his face, began to think.

"What has gone wrong?" he murmured—"what can have happened? How unfortunate it is that I should be left thus in the dark, and Newgate so closely guarded, and the time so short! Well, well—at all events, it will be perfectly useless for me to attempt an escape. Had I the means and the time, it would be equally useless, for now I have heard how Newgate is watched, from such good authority, I cannot doubt it, nor could I hope to leave it unperceived."

He was silent, giving up himself to gloomy thought.

His mind was principally occupied in thinking of Maud.

It was by no means difficult for him to picture her friendless and forlorn situation, and the reflection that he had been the means of bringing her into it by no means increased his cheerfulness.

Then, with a slow and solemn note, he heard the clock of St. Paul's Cathedral give forth the hour of ten.

How fearfully close the time appointed for his execution seemed to be.

To one thing, however, he had quite made up his mind, which was that it was impossible for him to escape, therefore he made no effort, but continued to sit in the same attitude upon the chair.

Eleven o'clock sounded, and found him still in the same position.

Any one gazing upon him would have found some difficulty in saying for certain whether he was sleeping or waking—to all appearances, however, he was completely blind and deaf to all that was going on around him.

He did not even raise his head when the clock struck.

Another hour passed.

Then midnight came.

The twelve strokes were given forth by all the various

churches around, the stillness being so great that distant ones were plainly audible.

In every variety of intonation was the hour proclaimed, and when the strokes had died away, the sound was succeeded by another less audible and of a far different character.

It required a momentary attention, before one could decide upon the nature of this sound.

It was that low, hoarse murmur something like the sound produced by the waves, and which is ever the accompaniment of a large mass of people.

That hoarse murmur, then, came from the dense throng of people outside Newgate—from those who, with extraordinary patience, had taken up their positions in the Old Bailey, in order, by waiting there, to be the first to catch a glimpse of the doomed man when the folding doors were unclosed.

A drizzling rain began to fall from a dark, overhanging sky—a rain that threatened to become more violent ere long, and which showed every indication of continuing without intermission for many hours.

But the steadiest downpour would not have had the effect of dispersing those who had congregated without.

Suddenly the sound of a footstep breaks the deep silence which reigns through the prison of Newgate.

More and more distinct it becomes, until at length it pauses before the door of Dick Turpin's cell.

A bright ray of light comes streaming through the huge keyhole, and falls upon the prisoner.

But he heeds it not.

Some words were hurriedly exchanged, followed by retreating footsteps.

Then the door of the cell was flung open.

A brilliant light seemed at once to be shed all over it, yet this was only by contrast with the previous darkness, for the illumination proceeded only from a lantern.

"Asleep!" said a voice. "Can it be possible? Would a man sleep thus on the night before his execution? Turpin—Turpin, awake!"

These words entered Dick's ears, and penetrated to his understanding.

With a sudden start, he looked up, and then he saw Mr. Bradbury, the Governor of the prison, standing before him.

CHAPTER DCCCLXX.

THE DETERMINATION OF THE HIGHWAYMEN TURNS OUT TO BE A MOST FORTUNATE ONE.

IN order to explain what follows, it is necessary to go back to the proceedings of Dick Turpin's comrades.

According to their stated intention, they quitted the Three Spiders, and made their way by the most direct route to the London Road.

There was no small amount of danger in so doing, but they reasonably concluded that, Dick being still in Newgate, the principal force of the police would be collected round that point.

At any rate, danger or not, that was the road they determined upon.

The very daring of the proceeding was likely to bring with it a certain amount of success.

"We cannot do much better," said Tom King, "than journey on to old Matthew's. Of all other men, he is the most likely to give us information respecting the captain."

"Yes, decidedly so," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and he is the man best calculated to help us in our present emergency. He is fertile in all expedients, and may perhaps give us advice well worthy of being followed."

"Not a doubt of it," joined in Claude Inval. "Come on, comrades—mend your pace a little! It is trying to one's patience to creep along like this!"

At a brisk trot the highwaymen now took their way along the hard, well-beaten road, nor did they pause or speak until the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the road behind them reached their ears.

"Hark!" said Tom, gently drawing in the reins, "some one is coming after us at full gallop. Who on earth can it be?"

"Some chance traveller perhaps," said Claude. "Push on—never mind!"

"But he will inevitably overtake us ere long," said Tom. "Let us pull up and draw to one side."

"No adventure, Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack—"no adventure! We have enough already on hand."

"I know that," was the answer. "Yet it will be better to allow this man, whoever he may be to pass, then we can follow on as we please."

"Well, just as you like," said Claude. "You have command of the expedition to-night, and you can do just as you like, provided that you don't embroil yourself in any other adventure."

"Don't fear that," said Tom King. "Look—yonder is a narrow lane. Let us go down that a little way; we shall then be unseen."

"But let us take a glance as he passes by, whoever he may be," said Jack.

"Oh, yes, certainly—I fully intended it."

Just on the left hand was a narrow lane, on both sides of which trees were growing very thickly, so that a deep shadow was cast all round about the spot.

Just at the mouth of this lane—if we may so call it—the highwaymen placed themselves in a line.

They knew they could depend upon their horses remaining motionless, and from their present position they would have no difficulty in glancing at the approaching traveller.

On he came, his speed accelerated, if anything.

It was a horse of rare quality, as the rate he was going at fully proved.

"He is no ordinary rider," said Tom King, "rest assured of that."

Scarcely had he spoken the words than the traveller, with a rush like an arrow, sped past the top of the lane, and was instantaneously lost to sight.

"One would think he was riding for his life," said Tom. "However, he is past, so we will jog on quietly behind him."

Just then the silence of the night was broken in upon by another sound.

This was the loud report of a firearm of some description, and scarcely had the report ceased before it was followed by another.

Then our friends fancied they heard a cry of pain.

"By Jove," said Tom, "he has stopped!"

He alluded to the traveller.

The next moment, however, the sound of a horse's hoofs could be heard as distinctly as ever.

"No, no," murmured his companions.

"But he is coming back now," said Tom. "What on earth is the meaning of this?"

There could be no doubt as to the truth of what Tom said.

The traveller was evidently galloping back at the same tremendous rate.

Tom King pressed forward a little nearer to the high-road, and this time caught sight of him.

The clouds, which up to then had covered the sky completely, parted in one spot, or, rather, the moon happened to shine through a portion of the clouds less dense than the remainder.

By the dim light thus shed upon the earth, Tom perceived, to his astonishment, that the traveller was seated in a most peculiar position on his steed.

His head was bent over towards the horse's neck, and his arms seemed to hang helpless by his sides.

Then, scarcely able to restrain a cry, Tom perceived him sway backward and forwards in such a manner as to place him in imminent danger of losing his balance.

Another roll to one side, and then, with a crash, the traveller fell into the roadway.

His foot was entangled in the stirrup, and the frightened horse galloped on.

Only for a few paces, however.

The gallant creature, with the rare instinct of its race, knowing that something was amiss with its rider, stood stone still.

Amazed at this occurrence, Tom was about to hasten to the stranger's assistance, when he heard another horseman approaching, so, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he stood still, and waited for him to approach.

This second horseman came on more carefully than the first, yet the speed he made was very great.

All at once, however, he appeared to catch sight of the prostrate form in the roadway and the horse standing

near it, for he uttered a faint cry, and slackened the pace of his own steed.

Less than a minute sufficed for him to reach the spot where the first traveller lay.

In a moment he flung himself from the saddle, almost before his horse had stopped.

From his pocket he produced a lantern, and, tracing back the slide, turned the rays full upon the face of the fallen man.

"Right," he said—"I am right."

He stooped down as if about to pick up something.

At this moment the prostrate stranger groaned.

Seeing this, Tom considered he had remained a passive spectator long enough.

Dismounting with ease and rapidity from his steed, he ran on tiptoe towards the spot where these events were taking place.

The second traveller was stooping down over the first, so Tom had him decidedly at an advantage.

With a powerful grasp, he seized him by the back of the neck.

With a yell of fear, this man raised himself, and endeavoured to twist his head round so as to obtain a view of his assailant.

In vain, however.

In his sudden fright he let go the lantern, but luckily it chanced to fall in an almost upright position.

Some of the rays fell upon the dress of the first traveller, and no sooner did he perceive it, than Tom King uttered an ejaculation.

"A messenger," he cried—"a royal messenger! I know the livery well."

These words reached the ears of his two friends, as he fully intended they should, and they both hastened towards him.

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, as soon as he arrived, "it's a King's messenger, sure enough. And look—what's this?"

He picked up the lantern, and turned its rays upon the second traveller, who held in his hands a little leathern bag, attached to which was a strap so that it could be slung across his shoulders.

"Why, that's his despatch," said Tom. "Seize it this moment!"

The second traveller resisted, holding tightly to the strap.

But Claude, with ready thought, drew his sword and severed it.

Finding himself thus foiled, the stranger, with a sudden cry of rage, made a tremendous effort to release himself from Tom's detaining grasp.

Luckily for him, it happened that our friend was not quite so vigilant as he should have been, his attention was being too much given to the proceedings of his comrades.

The consequence was that the effort was successful.

No sooner, however, did he break from his hold, than Tom drew forth a pistol.

"Hold!" he cried—"stop this moment, or I fire! Stop, I say! The consequences of refusal will be on your own head!"

But the flying man paid no attention to these words, and Tom, hastily levelling his pistol at the rapidly-retreating figure, pulled the trigger.

There was a loud report, followed by a screaming cry, then all was still.

If there had been any doubt as to the identity of the wounded man, it would have been set at rest by a glance at the leather bag Claude had obtained.

On one side it was mounted with the royal arms in silver, and over the lock on the other side were the same figures, only smaller.

Our friends looked at each other in bewildered surprise, as well they might, for so suddenly had all this occurred that they were scarcely able to come to any conclusion respecting it.

That the King's messenger had been shot down by the second traveller, who had been waiting in ambush for him, seemed pretty evident, and that he was anxious to obtain possession of the leather bag was equally clear—that, in fact, constituted the motive for the crime.

Whether the messenger was dead or only wounded our friends at present knew not.

Asking for the lantern, however, Tom King stooped down in the endeavour to ascertain.

The roadway all around was dyed with blood, which poured at an alarming rate from two wounds in the messenger's breast.

Tom King turned up the messenger's coat in such a manner as to cover them, and pressed his hand upon it.

By this means the flow of blood was temporarily checked.

"Speak," he said—"speak if you have the power. The man who shot you down is bailiff, the letter-bag is safe. Have you any request to make?"

The man struggled painfully to speak.

He fought wildly with his hands, plucking at his throat as though there was some obstruction there impeding speech.

At last, in scarcely articulate accents, he pronounced the words:

"Newgate—Newgate—New—"

He stopped.

A gush of blood issued from his lips, and with a convulsive shuddering of the limbs he fell back dead.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN WITNESS ANOTHER STRANGE SIGHT ON THEIR WAY TO LONDON

WHEN the first shock of horror and surprise was over, Tom King bent down over the body of the unfortunate messenger.

His object was to ascertain whether life was yet extinct.

He hoped that there might be some flutterings of existence that might be temporarily increased in strength.

The man had said too little.

It was necessary that many questions should be answered before the minds of the highwaymen could be completely set at rest.

One glance at the fallen jaw and the filmy eyes assured Tom that this hope was over.

The immortal essence had for ever gone.

"He is dead, comrades," he said, as he resumed an erect position. "This is a black piece of work, and as yet I can scarcely comprehend it."

"Nor I," said Claude and Jack.

There was a pause, for Tom wondered what should be the next step he should take.

He asked the opinion of his comrades upon it.

"My friends," he said, "what are we to do next? In what way shall we act, and what effect do you imagine this occurrence may have upon our future plans?"

"It will require time to think over these things," said Claude, "don't you think so, Jack?"

"I do indeed, and if, Tom, you would be guided by me, and—"

"What is it you advise?"

"Why, that without further delay we make the best of our way to the White Horse Inn, at the risk—"

"Never mind the risk."

"Let us go—let us lay all the facts before old Matthew, and let us hear what he has to say respecting them."

"I can think of nothing better," said Tom. "But are we to leave this poor fellow here?"

"No; and yet I do not see how we can be of any benefit to him."

"No, nor I either, only we may draw him on one side out of the way, so that he may escape further injury from any chance passenger."

"Yes, yes—by all means we will do that, and we will fasten his horse close by, leaving those who find him to place what construction they please upon the whole matter."

This suggestion was promptly carried out.

Despite the repugnance they could not help feeling at handling a dead body, the King's messenger was carefully raised and placed in a leaning position against a little embankment at one side of the highway.

His horse, which had stood perfectly still during the whole of the time, they secured to the low-lying branch of a tree, and so left him.

Just as they remounted their steeds and were about to turn away, Tom exclaimed:

"There's one point which I should like to have set at rest."

"What is that?"

"Why, to what extent my shot was effectual! I wonder where the assassin is, and who he can be?"

"It is easy to ride back a little way," said Claude; "and, precious as time is, I think it will be worth our while to do so."

"So do I," cried Tom. "Follow me—it will occupy scarcely a moment."

They rode off along the highway in the direction the assassin had taken until, having reached the spot where they believed Tom's bullet had struck him, they paused.

They still retained the lantern, and by its aid they perceived upon the ground a few dark red spots of blood.

Looking further, they saw that a hole had been forced in the hedge, and to one of the sharp, prickly boughs a shred of clothing was adhering.

This shred they took and carefully stowed away.

Beyond was a large field.

They looked at each other irresolutely.

Tom found that his companions were evidently waiting for him to speak, and so he said:

"I fancy the rascal is only slightly hurt, and by this time he may have got to some place of shelter, where he would, ten to one, remain and defy all our attempts at discovery. Unwillingly, then, I propose that we leave him to his fate."

"And so do we."

"Then forward, for, believe me, I am to the full as anxious to reach London as you possibly can be yourselves."

Again putting their horses to a sharp trot, they journeyed in the direction of the metropolis, exchanging but few words on the way.

Tom was wondering where horses could be bestowed in safety.

He had some dim recollection that there was a stable in the neighbourhood of Clare Market, the occupier of which was in league with old Matthew.

Vainly, however, did Tom try to remember any further particulars, and finally he was compelled to abandon the effort in despair.

Yet in his own mind he decided that they should make their way to the White Horse by the back way.

They would then be less likely to be observed by any of the officers.

So deeply absorbed was Tom by his reflections, that he paid no attention whatever to anything around him.

All at once he was aroused by ejaculations from his companions, who with one accord reined in their horses.

"What is it?" he asked, following their example instinctively—"what's amiss?"

"Look there!" said Claude, pointing with his whip. "Is it possible you did not notice it?"

Tom glanced quickly in the direction indicated, and then ceased to be surprised at his companions' astonishment.

They had now arrived within view of that ill-omened spot Tyburn.

In journeying to London they could not avoid passing by it.

Generally their gaze was half-averted as they passed by, and indeed on most occasions the darkness was so intense that it was more by imagination than actual vision that they saw the dismal-looking blackened beams.

But now Tyburn Tree presented a very different appearance.

It was lighted up by the fierce red glow of a fire, the light of which shone with picturesque and rembrandt-like effect upon the ancient timber.

The tree was cleared—that is to say, none of its horrible fruit was dependent from it.

For some time Tom and his companions remained quite still gazing upon this strange spectacle.

"What does it mean?" asked Tom King at last, in a subdued voice. "How strange!"

"Very," responded Claude; "but I am as much in the dark as you are."

"So am I," added Sixteen-String Jack, "but let us creep a little closer, and then, in all probability, we shall ascertain."

About a dissentient word this suggestion was acted

Allowing their horses to proceed at a walk only, the highwaymen gradually drew closer and closer to the ghastly spot.

At length they reached a point from which a distinct and perfect view could be obtained, and then they at once met with the solution to what had looked a short time before so incomprehensible.

Encamped round Tyburn Tree was a strong detachment of soldiers, and for their own comfort they had kindled two or three blazing fires.

The effect indeed was pleasant to behold, for the fire-light flickered prettily upon the polished accoutrements of the soldiers.

Their arms were all piled, and the men stood about in clusters here and there quite at their ease.

Outside could be perceived the dark forms of many other persons, in all perhaps two hundred.

"It's clear enough now," said Tom King, as he set his horse in motion, "Tom Davis's information was correct. To-morrow is appointed for Dick's execution, and these preparations are being made for it."

"Yes, no doubt."

"And," continued Tom, "the authorities have evidently made up their minds that the law shall take effect. Those soldiers have been sent in anticipation of the gathering of a large crowd between now and morning. Whenever it becomes necessary they will form an impenetrable square around Tyburn Tree, and so keep the mob from pressing too closely upon it."

"Yes, yes—that's it. Come on—we've seen enough."

"We have," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but if I live, the authorities shall be balked, even though it be at the last moment, and in spite of all these extra precautions that they have taken."

"So say I," cried Claude, heartily, "and yet that sight you'd shows that they are terribly in earnest. It won't be a trifle that will stop them."

"True," said Tom King. "But forward now, and let us waste no more breath in conversation. I have already decided where to go and what to do, so follow me and all will be well in that respect."

His two companions complied without another syllable.

Riding direct into Lincoln's Inn Fields, then a very lonely, unfrequented place after nightfall, he turned to the right, and the highwaymen soon found themselves in the midst of the narrow insalubrious streets in that locality.

In Vere Street, at the corner of a narrow turning, stood a large public-house, and, upon reaching it, Tom saw at a glance that there was accommodation for horses.

Turning up this narrow street, he quickly paused in front of some large gates, which were closed.

A ring at the bell brought the ostler forward.

Tom spoke in quick, authoritative tones.

"Here—be quick," he cried, "take charge of these three horses. We shall be back soon—perhaps in half an hour, or it may be less or more; but have the horses ready, and it will be something in your pocket."

Without waiting for any reply to these orders, the highwaymen all alighted from their steeds, and strode off in the direction of Drury Lane.

The ostler was quite surprised at the whole transaction, or rather at the suddenness of it.

But grumbling something or other, unintelligible to anyone but himself, he took hold of the horses by their bridles and led them through the gateway.

All three of our friends looked after their steeds wistfully.

Great indeed would have been their satisfaction could they have seen them safely housed, and known just where to find them.

The attempt at this, however, might prove an additional source of danger.

The ostler, or some other person, might see and recognise them.

The distance to White Horse Yard was now insignificant—a few hundred yards brought the highwaymen to the extremity of it.

On their way, without appearing to do so, they kept a vigilant look-out, but saw nothing whatever of a character to excite their suspicions.

Pausing at the little door in the wall that has been so often mentioned, Tom pressed upon the secret spring, and waited with anxiety for the result.



[THE GOVERNOR'S MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.]

Scarcely a moment elapsed before they heard the sound of a footstep.

The door was cautiously opened a little way, and old Matthew's form appeared.

He recognised our friends at a glance.

"Come in," he said. "Quick—quick! The sooner the better, or you may be seen! I have been watching for you for hours and hours. Come in!"

Wondering why he had been waiting, for they were not conscious of having made any appointment, and besides, never dreaming of repairing to the White Horse by daylight, the highwaymen obeyed him by stepping as rapidly as they could across the threshold.

"Why, Matthew," they asked, "what is it?"

"Don't speak now. This way. One more minute, and we shall be in comfort; not that there will be any time for talk; you must employ the next few hours in earnest action."

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"We are quite ready, Matthew," was the reply. "But, first of all, there is an important matter which must be discussed by all of us, and to which I trust you will give your best attention, in order that you may advise us how to proceed."

"You may depend upon that," replied old Matthew, in a tone of seriousness that was indeed unusual with him. "There—there, now we are all right, and need fear no interruption. Say on, I am burning with curiosity to know what it is you wish to impart."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXII.

TOM KING ANNOUNCES HIS INFLEXIBLE DETERMINATION TO HIS COMRADES AND OLD MATTHEW.

WHILE this brief conversation was going on, old Matthew hurried his three visitors across the yard and into the

little private room behind the bar where he had so often held conferences with the highwaymen, and where, as we know, he had such an elaborate piece of mechanism to warn him of the entrance of any police officers or suspicious person into the house.

"Speak low," he said, as the highwaymen seated themselves around the fire, which they were glad to do for the night was chilly—"not a soul knows of your arrival, I firmly believe, and, if you are only ordinarily careful, we shall settle everything with comfort."

"But, first of all," said Tom, "satisfy me on a point which puzzles me completely."

"Well, what is it?"

"Why, you said you had been waiting for us—what made you expect we should arrive? The resolution was only made, I might say, at the last moment."

"Why," said old Matthew, "simply because Dick has sent here several times to-day to know whether there was any intelligence for him or not. Of course there was none, and that made me in momentary expectation of some of you."

"Then he is still in Newgate?"

"Yes, he was less than an hour ago, and I daresay is now; and, speaking candidly, there I think he is likely to remain, unless you can contrive to get him out by main force or stratagem."

"Has there been any communication from the King?"

"None that I have heard of."

"Then Davis's forebodings are only too true. But stay, it will save time if I begin at the beginning and tell you all."

Old Matthew nodded, as though he fully believed this.

Accordingly, Tom commenced relating to Dick's old friend all those events with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

There is no necessity for repeating his brief summary of them.

To the account of the assassination old Matthew listened with the keenest interest, and asking many questions with the view of eliciting every detail.

"Now you know all," said Tom, in conclusion, "and, such being the case, think the whole over and give us your advice."

"I will. But hush!—wait an instant."

All this time old Matthew's eyes had been directed to one particular part of the wall, the spot indeed that was occupied by the supposititious clock.

As usual, the clock showed the hour of six, but just as Matthew spoke, the hand dropped to the quarter past.

The highwaymen had all been made familiar with this piece of mechanism, and they gazed upon it with mingled interest and admiration.

"Just keep quiet," said old Matthew. "There's some one standing at the bar to drink—I wonder who it is? Ah! look there."

The hand dropped to the half hour.

An anxious look settled upon all their countenances.

"Something suspicious," said old Matthew. "This is what I feared—I was afraid the coming and going of that jailer so frequently would be noticed. Depend upon it, some police officer has seen him, and now they are again on the alert. We may have some trouble—not that it would matter on any other night than the present, for I could baffle them easily; but now every moment is precious indeed."

So the highwaymen felt, and they remained with their eyes fixed upon the dial-plate with an intensity that can scarcely be imagined.

Suddenly there was a simultaneous cry of relief.

The long hand flew back to its original position, and the clock again showed the hour of six.

"All right so far," said Matthew, settling himself more comfortably in his chair. "A false alarm, I suppose—nothing more."

"But is the danger over, think you?"

"For the present, I can answer most certainly in the affirmative, and should anything fresh arise, fear not that we should receive timely intimation of it."

With this assurance, the highwaymen were satisfied, and now they remained waiting, with no small amount of anxiety, for old Matthew to communicate his views upon the subject laid before him.

Before he spoke, he took hold of the letter-bag, which,

we need scarcely say, had been carefully taken care of by the highwaymen.

He turned it over and over several times, looking longingly at the lock, and making one or two feeble attempts to open it.

"If I could only peep inside," he said, "then our doubts would be at rest—we should know just what to do. The royal arms are on it. There's a letter inside evidently from the King to the Governor of Newgate, the question is, does it concern the captain? Is it the order for his release?"

Old Matthew twisted the letter-bag over and over again.

"That's just the question," said Tom King, leaning forward in his earnestness. "I wish with all my heart that we could ascertain that."

"It is impossible, I fear," returned Matthew. "To open this bag would be, in my opinion, in the highest degree dangerous; the Governor would know then that something was amiss."

"But what baffles me," said Claude Duval, "is the assassination of the messenger. By whom could that have been perpetrated, and what was the object? Certainly we know so far as this, that it was intended to prevent the delivery of the letter-bag."

"That, I fear, will remain an unexplained mystery we may conjecture something upon it, and yet be all the time far from the truth. The principal thing to me appears to be what shall we do with the letter-bag?"

"And to me also," said Tom King. "Let us fix our attention upon that."

There was a long pause.

It was broken by old Matthew.

"As it is unwise, if not impossible, to open this bag and glean the nature of its contents, the question is, shall we deliver it at the prison and wait a short time and ascertain the effect produced by it? If none at all, why, then we must make up our minds to some desperate proceeding."

"It seems so," answered Tom. "But I confess my own uneasiness increases rather than abates. In such a case the only thing that we could do would be to attempt a rescue at Tyburn, and I sadly fear that, however well that might be organised, it would fail; the authorities have been served that trick once, and what we saw to-night proves clearly that they will be prepared at all points for resistance."

An ominous silence followed this speech, from which it might be inferred that its truth could not be disputed by anyone present.

Again their attention was distracted by the dial-plate.

The hand fell rapidly to the quarter, and from the quarter to the half-hour, as before.

"Confound it!" said old Matthew, angrily. "There's some one lurking about, I am quite sure of it. However, keep still, there's no cause for immediate apprehension; perhaps the danger will pass away as before."

Had he expressed a wish to this effect its fulfilment would have been immediate, for even while he spoke the clock signalled "all well."

"It is best to be over cautious," he said. "I have given strict injunctions. Better a thousand false alarms than to be kept a moment too late."

"Oh, certainly," said Tom—"most certainly!" And while he spoke he rose to his feet.

There was an air of determination about him which all immediately noticed, and long before he spoke they knew that he had formed a settled resolution.

"My mind is made up," he said—"firmly made up. That letter-bag shall be delivered, and we will run the risk for an hour or two of the effect it produces. Give it here, Matthew, I will take it myself."

"You take it?" ejaculated Matthew. "Nonsense—you are mad! I will never suffer such a thing!"

"I am in earnest," said Tom, "and nothing in the world shall cause me to change my decision. Give it to me; I shall not be content until I know for certain that it is delivered safely. And how can I be so well assured of that as I shall be if I place it in the Governor's hands myself?"

"But it is outrageous—impossible!" cried old Matthew, excitedly. "Even if this bag contains the message we so earnestly wish for, you will only be thrusting your own neck into the noose."

"No matter," said Tom, if possible more firmly than before—"no matter, my mind is made up! I will go! Yes, I would not shrink even though I felt certain that my instant death followed the delivery of the bag. Now you know my determination, and words and entreaties will be alike powerless to turn me from it."

A dead silence followed no utterance of these words, and old Matthew suffered Tom King to take the letter-bag from his hands, not making a further show of resistance.

"This should be done alone," Tom went on; "and if I am successful, you will shortly be aware of it."

At this juncture, however, Claude and Jack warmly interposed.

"No, no, Tom," they said; "we are willing to give in to you to almost any extent, but we cannot allow you to have things entirely your own way. No, no; not by any means. We have heard your decision; now hear ours. If you persevere in your intention, we will accompany you on this the most perilous and rash adventure we have yet undertaken."

"Do it so, then," said Tom, and they could tell by his manner that he felt a secret pleasure at this manifestation of devotion—"be it so. I would allow no opposition myself, therefore I will offer none to you."

"Then it's settled," said Claude and Jack. "Now, Matthew, one glass, and we start. That will just allow us the opportunity to see that our weapons are in perfect order, for we may have to use them ere long."

"No remonstrances," broke in Tom King, sternly, fancying that Matthew was about to put in a protest—"no remonstrances. We will be deaf to all."

"I am sorry you are so headstrong," said Matthew, placing a glass before each—"very sorry; because, if I could only get you to see it, there would be very much more prudence and safety in my delivering this letter-bag than in your taking it, and I trust that the suggestion as I now make it will be acted upon."

"No, no, Matthew," said Tom King, "I must positively refuse you. I am Dick Turpin's best and nearest friend. We have been many a time in the utmost danger, and the one has never hesitated to sacrifice himself for the other. Dick's life is now at stake—literally, it is trembling in the balance. On such an occasion, then, I will yield the right of aiding him to no man, not even, Matthew, to you."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIII.

GIVES A LONG, BUT NECESSARY, EXPLANATION RESPECTING THE ASSASSINATION OF THE KING'S MESSENGER.

In order not to leave any mystery unsolved, it may, perhaps, as well in this place to interrupt the thread of the narrative, for a moment, to explain why, and by whom, the King's messenger had been assassinated.

It was not until afterwards, however, that the facts came to the knowledge of the highwaymen.

But still, it will be seen, their relation now will serve to make all perfectly clear.

The reader will remember Lord Spindelow, and with reference to whom it must be mentioned that he occupied a prominent position at court, and was indeed high in favour with the King.

Yet he was not satisfied; and hearing by chance of the existence of the mysterious letter, he, by a clever stratagem, gained possession of it, and then found himself in a position to exercise unlimited power, not only over the mysterious lady, but over the King himself.

It must be understood, though, that while he held unlawful possession of this letter, no opportunity arose for him to make use of it.

Willis was one of the King's personal attendants, and, by various means, Lord Spindelow had won him over entirely to his interests, employing him generally to act as spy upon his royal master.

On the evening that Tom King had his strange interview with royalty, Willis applied his ear to the keyhole of the conservatory door, and managed to glean something of the matters that were discussed between them.

Lord Spindelow was at the time absent from the castle, but on his return on the following day, he was at once made acquainted with everything.

In London his lordship had learned with unfeigned

delight that Dick Turpin was at last a prisoner in Newgate, and that he would inevitably perish at Tyburn.

It may be guessed how revengeful and bitter would be his feelings towards him; and, indeed, it was with difficulty that he could restrain himself from paying a visit to Newgate, in order to exact over him.

No sooner did he hear that the King had promised to liberate Dick Turpin than he was frantic with rage.

But, in such a position, what was he to do to help himself?

Dark thoughts quickly rose in his mind, especially when he learned that a messenger had already been despatched.

He did not hesitate then to form a bloodthirsty resolution.

Obtaining a fleet horse, he started off in pursuit of the messenger; but owing to the latter having paused at a small inn lying a little way off the road—where, in fact, there was a pretty daughter to whom he paid his attentions at every opportunity—Lord Spindelow missed him, and did not discover the fact until, at a hard gallop, he performed nearly the whole of the journey to London.

Then he reined up and looked about him with the intention of riding back slowly in order to meet the man he wanted.

His calculation was that if he could assassinate this man, destroy the letter, and hide all traces of his crime, Dick Turpin's execution would take place before there would be time to communicate again with the King.

Then, as for the discovery of the murder, he hoped to avoid all the consequences resulting from the same.

This, then, gives us the necessary clue.

We have seen how the unfortunate messenger fell into the ambush laid for him, and how the bullet which Lord Spindelow despatched upon its deadly errand did its work.

When Tom fired, the bullet from his pistol struck his lordship near the shoulder, inflicting a painful and dangerous-looking wound. But aware of the consequences that would follow his discovery and recognition, he felt himself moved to double strength to make the effort to escape, and so he forced his way through the hedge, and staggered rather than walked across a field.

Here he came to another hedge, through which he made his way with still more difficulty.

Then another field, and afterwards he perceived a light gleaming in the darkness.

Doubting not that it proceeded from the window of some cottage, he struggled painfully on in the hope of reaching it at every step.

He felt, however, that his strength was rapidly leaving him.

Finding this to be the case, oaths and curses of the most horrible description issued from his lips.

What angered him more than all was the knowledge that, after having committed the crime of murder, he had been foiled at last.

His eyes grew dizzy, and it was with difficulty he made out the objects by which he was surrounded.

Suddenly he stumbled, and the shock this gave him seemed to revive him a little.

Greatly to his surprise, he found that he had reached the rude palisading with which the garden of the cottage was surrounded.

He could see the humble little habitation plainly enough now, and, still holding by the palisades, crept on slowly in the hope of finding the gate.

He was successful.

Pushing it open, and leaving a trail of blood behind him as he went, he staggered up to the door.

He tried to knock, but his strength failed him, and he fell with a dull, lumbering sound against the panel.

A faint scream came from the interior of the cottage.

Then the door was unlocked.

No sooner was the fastening removed than the weight of Lord Spindelow's body forced the door open with great violence, and he fell heavily upon the threshold.

The greatest consternation was created in the village by the occurrence of this event.

But when their first alarm was over, the inmates turned their attention to the wounded stranger.

Gently they raised him and carried him towards the fire.

They saw that blood was pouring from the wound, and tried in vain to check it.

They called upon him, and entreated him to speak, disclosing his name and place of abode.

But his lordship's tongue was silenced for ever; he could only move his lips in vain attempts at articulation.

By the shape of his lips, however, the people fancied that he asked for water, and so a small quantity was brought and placed to his lips.

He drank it eagerly, and no sooner had he done so than, as is frequently the case under such circumstances, he drew a deep breath and expired.

It was terrible and strange to think he should be overtaken by a retribution of this kind.

He had perished as nearly as possible as the man had perished he had so cowardly assassinated.

The poor inhabitants of the cottage were not a little alarmed at such an incident as this.

For aught they knew, they might be regarded with suspicion, and have some difficulty in clearing themselves.

Searching in the pockets of the deceased, they found papers which disclosed his name, and title, and all the information they required.

The knowledge that he was a nobleman only increased their terror, for they knew there would be a great outcry respecting his death.

The particulars of the tragedy in the high-road, however, never came to their ears.

Lord Spindelov's relatives were communicated with, and the body removed.

Then it was that Willis, finding himself freed from his hard taskmaster, confessed all to the King.

Could the unscrupulous nobleman have succeeded in his design of intercepting the messenger's letter-bag, there is no doubt that Dick Turpin would have perished, for the King, having despatched the letter, would probably have thought no more upon the subject.

We have yet to describe how the letter-bag was delivered, and the effects produced by it.

As will be seen, it was the means of bringing upon the highwaymen no small amount of danger.

Not to anticipate, however, we will go back to the White Horse, and relate what followed Tom King's declaration as to his intentions regarding his comrade.

Having spoken as he did with great firmness and dignity, he glanced around upon the friends who stood near him, as if daring them to raise a word by way of objection.

Perhaps they felt this. At any rate, a silence of some moments ensued, which was at last broken by old Matthew himself.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DELAY THEIR DEPARTURE FROM THE WHITE HORSE UNTIL TOO LATE.

"WELL, Tom," he said, "a wilful man must have his own way, and so I suppose you will. As to duty or right, I say nothing at all, my only wish being to propose that which is most likely to secure the safety of all."

"I know that, Matthew. But I am so firmly bent upon this enterprise, and I am so fully possessed with the value of this leather bag that I cannot think of allowing it to be delivered by any other hand than my own."

"Well, then," said Matthew, "since that is the case, I can only wish you good luck. Let me recommend you to start at once, for the sooner Dick is out the better."

"Decidedly. Come, comrades, are you ready?"

"We are, quite."

"This way, then," said Matthew—"this way."

While he spoke, a faint clicking sound was heard.

He started, and looked towards the clock.

The finger then stood at the quarter past, and just as he was raising his finger it described a complete semicircle, stopping at a quarter to seven.

"There is danger—immediate danger," he said, in a tone of vexation. "Confound it! What a pity it is we have wasted so much time in discussion! But for that, you might have started ten minutes ago, and there would have been no trouble at all."

"But we must make the best of it."

"I knew that. This way—this way. I wish I could

stop to give you some instructions, but I can't. You must just be content to remain here."

With that rapidity which always characterised his movements whenever danger was pressing, old Matthew had crossed the parlour towards the fireplace.

Then, very much to the surprise of the highwaymen, who wondered what he was going to do, he seized hold of one end of the chimney-piece, and pulled with all his might.

A most singular result followed.

The whole of the fireplace, fire and all, came out bodily, turning on hinges fixed at the opposite side of the chimney-piece to that at which Matthew was pulling. The effect, indeed, was just the same as if the whole of the fireplace had been a door.

A dark, uncomfortable-looking cavity could be seen behind.

The highwaymen hung back a little.

"In there," said old Matthew—"in there—it is your only chance—and remain until I come to you again."

"But——" began Tom.

"No remonstrances—in with you! Dark! Can't you hear them now?"

Footsteps indeed could be plainly heard, mingled with voices.

Matthew thrust the highwaymen almost into the hiding-place, then, with one quick movement, restored the fireplace to its original condition.

It was done instantaneously, and no trace whatever was left to show that it had ever been disturbed.

Surely, if any hiding-place would escape the acuteness of the officers, that would.

All this, that has taken so many words to describe, actually took place in a briefer period of time than would perhaps be imagined; in fact, before anyone at a moderate speed could have counted twenty, the highwaymen were securely hidden.

Old Matthew, not losing his presence of mind in the least, nor becoming flurried, turned round to the table and picked up the glasses that had just been used.

He was in the act of doing this when the door of the parlour was dashed violently open, and several police officers appeared.

From the way in which they glanced around the room, and the disappointed look which settled upon their countenances, it was evident that they fully expected to find some one else there than the laird.

Old Matthew affected to be taken completely by surprise.

He let one of the glasses slip from his fingers, and it fell to the floor with a crash.

Then, stepping back, he ejaculated:

"Goodness gracious, men, how you startled me, to be sure! I never expected such a thing. Why, what on earth is the matter?"

"Matter?" said the officer in command. "We know you are up to your old tricks again; but mark me, old fellow—you have been successful for a long time, but you will be caught at last."

"Not by you, though," said Matthew, calmly.

"I don't know that," said the officer. "At any rate, I command you, upon pain of immediate arrest, to remain where you are. Sit down in the chair, and don't leave it."

"But what for?" asked old Matthew. "Why should you take these proceedings against me?"

"Simply because we intend to search this house."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again. It is only by repeatedly doing it that we can hope to succeed at last, and I want you there, and I want to keep my eyes upon you, so that you do nothing towards hiding anybody."

"And who should I hide?"

"Oh, you know best how to answer that question, but on one point I am quite confident."

"May I inquire what that is?"

"Yes, certainly you may."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Why, I know, by my own observation, that you have been in continual communication with Dick Turpin in Newgate. Don't deny it, because, if you do, it will be equivalent to calling me a liar. Now, I want to know what the communication was about."

Old Matthew shook his head slowly backwards and forwards.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, you see," said Matthew, "you have placed me in a very awkward position."

"Indeed!—how?"

"Why, by not permitting me to deny it."

"Would you have the audacity?"

"Yes, certainly I would, and I assure you that you must have been deceived in some way—how, I can't pretend to tell. But why do you think I should have any communication with the prisoner?"

"Oh, it's all very fine, Matthew; but I've heard your character over and over again, and mark me this—you will have to be ten times more careful and clever than ever you have been to escape us. Let us once catch you, and see if we are not down on you."

"I don't doubt it," said Matthew; "but I take all such threats with composure—I am not at all afraid."

"Well, confound your impudence!" said the officer. "One would think, to hear you speak, that you were a much-injured man, and never credit that this house is known throughout London as being one of the chief resorts of all members of the 'Family,' and especially the flash ones."

"I have enemies," said Matthew, with a sigh—"men who will say anything against me. Will you allow me to ask you one question?"

"Oh yes, by all means."

"Well, then, have you or any other officer ever found anything to warrant your suspicious when making a search in my house?"

"Yes, plenty to make us suspicious," was the answer; "but, luckily for you, we have not been able to get at the proofs."

"Oh, that's the way, with you," said Matthew. "But just tell me what you expect to find."

"Well, then, I don't mind if I do. We expect to find some of Dick Turpin's comrades here, and if they are beneath this roof—as we firmly believe them to be—we will have them."

"And why do you imagine such an unlikely thing as that?" said Matthew.

"Unlikely? What other conclusion could we come to upon finding that a turnkey was running backwards and forwards between here and Newgate all the time? You, I daresay, have not had a direct communication with the prisoner, but, then, does it not point to the fact that there is some one in this house, interested in his fate, who has?"

Old Matthew regarded the officer with admiration.

Then drawing a long breath and shaking his head, he said, emphatically:

"Oh! it's a pity—a great pity."

"What's a pity?"

"Why, that men should mistake their vocations. Now, what a mistake you must have made in becoming a police officer."

"Bah! nonsense!"

"I stick to it," said Matthew; "just think what a lawyer you would have made if you had only given your attention to it; I never heard anybody speak so much like one in my life, never—never."

The officer hardly knew whether to feel flattered or offended at these remarks.

Accordingly he passed them over without notice.

"To the point, Matthew," he said. "You are very likely surprised that I should be remaining here like this talking to you so quietly; but just let me alarm you a little."

"Alarm me?" repeated Matthew, with a start.

"Yes; while I am here keeping such good watch on all your movements, a lot of my men are round the building, some more are searching the cellars, some more are searching the rooms upstairs, and others are on the roof."

"Of course you have a warrant?"

"Oh yes, I have a warrant; don't think I should put myself in the power of such a dangerous customer as you are. No, no—I know better than that."

"Well," said Matthew, "I hope the search will soon be over, and that you will leave me in peace."

"The search will soon be over," said the officer—"that is, if we find those we are in search of, and in the event of so doing, why, off you go along with us, and your business may take care of itself as best it may."

Matthew smiled.

"I am content," he said—"quite content. And so I am to sit in this chair during your good will and pleasure?"

"Yes."

"Oh, it might be worse—much worse; perhaps you don't object to my drawing a little nearer to the fire?"

"Oh no."

"Well, that's a comfort; I am just going to finish my glass; perhaps you would all like a drop of something?"

The officers behind their chief in a moment looked as though they should very much.

"Well," said the one in command, stroking his chin, "just a little perhaps wouldn't be amiss."

"Very likely," said Matthew, changing his tone and speaking with resolution; "but I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Officers, I'll see you all jolly well d—d before you have a drop of anything that's in my house, except, mind you, when you succeed in capturing those you speak of, and then, why you shall be welcome to the best there is in the cellar, and to as much of it as you can drink."

"Yes, we know that," said the officer, pretending not to look disappointed; "you wouldn't be able to help yourself then, old fellow; we should have it all our own way—not that I wanted a drop, and I'm sure not one of my men does. But you will do yourself no good, so mark that. If ever I can once catch you, you shall pay dearly for it."

"Ah, I shouldn't wonder," said old Matthew, sipping his brandy-and-water with an air of satisfaction that was aggravating indeed to the officers, and especially when he smacked his lips as if to say "that's good." "They are a long while upstairs," he added; "perhaps they may be longer, so if you have no objections, gentlemen, I will have a quiet smoke and soothe my nerves."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXV.

THE POLICE OFFICER AND OLD MATTHEW HAD RATHER A STRANGE CONVERSATION WITH EACH OTHER.

WITH the greatest possible composure, old Matthew filled his pipe, lighted it, and leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who was bent upon enjoying himself.

The police officers evidently looked upon his coolness with great misgivings.

"Surely," they thought, "if he has anyone concealed upon the premises he could not remain so indifferent as he appeared to be."

Had they not known old Matthew so well as they did, they would have been still more of this opinion.

But they were well aware that he was as cunning as a fox, and quite capable of acting in this manner on purpose to throw them off their guard.

The fact was, Matthew felt quite secure in the excellence of the hiding-place he had last devised.

He was perfectly certain that no one had the remotest idea of its existence except himself and those who were at that moment concealed.

Every now and then a lumbering sound would be heard above, followed by one below.

On such occasions Matthew would just glance up and down, but no more.

"You seem to take it d—d easy!" said the chief officer at length, for he was getting enraged.

So long a time had elapsed since his men begun to search, that he began to be terribly afraid that the chances of their finding anybody now were small indeed. No one's disappointment could be greater than his.

He had observed the friendly jailer going backwards and forwards, as he said, and had not unreasonably jumped to the conclusion that the reason was some of Dick Turpin's comrades were concealed at the White Horse.

Under this impression, he had succeeded in persuading his superiors to allow him to have the use of about twenty men to make a thorough search.

His request was granted with great reluctance, for the authorities were most anxious to keep the prisoner they had already secured, and to that end nearly the whole available force was occupied in watching Newgate; and the Governor had by no means exaggerated when he described how impossible it was for any living thing to leave the prison unseen.

At length the trampling of many feet could be heard upon the staircase.

Matthew looked up, and so did the officers.

Directly afterwards a knock was given at the door of the parlour, and several more police officers entered.

"Well, Jenkins," cried the chief, gruffly, "what is it—what's the result?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Jenkins, touching his hat respectfully, "but I give you my word that we have searched every square inch upstairs, and can't find no traces of nobody."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. There is not a corner in which a cat could have crept which we have not rigidly examined."

"Have you left anyone up?"

"No, sir—I began at the top and cleared the way before me."

Before the officer had time to make any further remark, those who had been searching in the cellars also appeared, and they brought with them the same tale.

Then the chief, looking towards old Matthew, said:

"You hear?"

"I do hear perfectly well. It's just what I expected. You wouldn't believe that I had no one concealed. I hope you are satisfied at last."

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Gale—I don't know! Could I have a word or two with you in private?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish!"

"Well, then, I hope you will be attentive."

Then, turning to his men, he bade them depart, saying he would rejoin them presently.

Old Matthew ordered what was coming next.

The officer took a chair, and brought it close to the fire, and seated himself.

Little did he think that those of whom he was in search were at that very instant at little more than arm's-length from him.

"Matthew," he said, "I hope you will have a little serious talk with me—it is on a serious subject."

"Well, I don't mind," said Matthew. "Speak up!"

"I will. Now, in the first place, you won't feel flattered when I say that I believe you to be a very clever fellow—more clever than people generally are inclined to admit."

Matthew made a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, it's true—it's true," said the officer, "but the unfortunate thing is that you should have allowed your cleverness to run in the wrong direction. If you had sided with us instead of the 'family' it would have been a much better thing for you, and even now it is not too late, which brings me to what I was going to talk about."

Old Matthew remained silent.

The officer cleared his throat, and went on:

"In spite of my close search," he said, "I am not satisfied that the men I want are not hidden in this house—they are in some secure, out-of-the-way place. Now, assuming such to be the case, I will tell you what I propose, and which I have the best of authority for proposing."

"Proceed," said old Matthew, "I am paying every attention."

"No doubt you are. Well, then, my proposition is that you deliver those highwaymen over to us. You need not appear to do so—the fact of your complicity need never be known. A wink or a sign will be enough to let us know where to search. Then, if we capture them, well and good—they cannot blame you. Step—stop," he added, hurriedly, perceiving that old Matthew was trying to interrupt him—"hear me out to the end! In return for this, supposing you are willing, I am empowered to offer you one half of the total reward—that is to say, seven hundred pounds, and not only that, a perfect immunity from all that you have done in the past, and with the probability of doing the same bit of business over again."

"And so you advise me to betray them?" said Matthew.

"Yes, certainly! And I daresay it strikes you as a singular thing that we officers should all be agreed to give you one half the reward, when in reality you will have so small a share in earning it?"

"Well, I am rather surprised, I confess."

"Perhaps you feel doubtful, but if you do you are

wrong. Our reason is that we wish above all things to secure those offenders, and we don't think we can do it without your aid—that's the reason, for our continual failures have got us into such sad disgrace that nothing but this capture can put us right. I wish with all my heart that Dick Tarpia was at liberty, so that we could have the chance of capturing him. I wonder what business a lot of gentlemen had to interfere, and so take the credit out of our hands?"

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds?" repeated Matthew, musingly. "That's a large sum."

"Yes, a very large sum," said the officer, with glittering eyes, and speaking with some excitement—"such a sum as you don't often handle, I'll warrant. It would be more than the amount of a year's profits, if you did ever so good a trade, and be very much more than you could hope to get from the highwaymen for defending them, besides the risk you run of your own liberty."

"It's worth thinking over," said Matthew—"it's worth thinking over."

"Do you indeed think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, then, so do I, and if you are wise you will think over it repeatedly. Perhaps you will be able to come to a decision at once?"

"Well, perhaps I should," was the answer, "only for one little difficulty that stands in the way."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, you ought to know perfectly well that the men you want are not here at the present moment, for if they were they could not escape the vigilant search of your men."

Upon receiving this reply, the officer looked at old Matthew keenly, as if doubtful as to his veracity.

"It is so," added our old friend, "and I don't mind saying that what you have just told me has made an impression. I didn't think of it before in that light, and I promise you to turn the matter over in my mind."

"Do so, and I am certain that reflection will bring you to the right decision. And now let us have a glass of something upon the good faith of what you say."

"I don't mind if I do."

Old Matthew rose from his seat and went into the bar, with the view of supplying his customer's wants.

When his back was turned, there was a peculiar smile upon his face—one which the officer probably would not have cared about seeing.

Having obtained what was requisite, Matthew stepped silently to the door of the parlour, and, just peeping in, saw that the officer had taken advantage of his absence to make a rigid search around.

Matthew darted into the room suddenly.

The officer, thus caught, looked rather confused.

"Ah!" said old Matthew—"doubtful still, I perceive. Well, one would think that, after having received so many proofs, you officers would be content to take my word."

"Oh, pooh! don't mention it," said the officer. "I could not resist the temptation of looking round me, and that's a fact."

"Well, don't let me interrupt you, then," said Matthew. "Make no stranger of me. Search as long and as much as you are willing."

The confident, easy tone in which these words were spoken, and the coolness Matthew had displayed all along, brought the officer at last to the conviction that in one respect he had been mistaken.

If the highwaymen had been there, they were not at the inn now; but that a communication had been made with Dick in Nowgate he was absolutely certain.

With cunning calculation, he made sure that more good was to be done by pretending to keep on a friendly footing with Matthew than by coming to an open rupture with him; and, indeed, the officer felt he had good cause to be satisfied with the impression he believed he had already made upon Matthew, for the temptation of handling seven hundred and fifty pounds was a very great one indeed.

It was not long after that the officer rose to take his departure.

Matthew rose also, determined to see him safely out of his house.

The officer, if he had any intentions of attempting to remain, abandoned them, for he walked out into Drury Lane and called his men around him.

Then, bidding farewell to Matthew, he marched off with them, our old friend standing on the steps of his house and watching them until the intervening horses hid them from his view.

Then, rubbing his hands briskly together, and with a smile of satisfaction on his lips, he turned round and hastened to the bar.

As he passed the girl who served the customers he said, in a hurried whisper:

"Are you quite sure all the officers have left the house?"

"I am not quite sure," was the response. "My belief is that one or more are in hiding somewhere."

"Well, well," said Matthew, "all you can do is to keep your eyes wide open. I will go back into the parlour, and if you see anything in the least degree suspicious, give the signal instantly. I shall be on the lookout. Don't be afraid of making a mistake. Better have a thousand false alarms than give the signal of danger too late."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVI.

OLD MATTHEW RELEASES THE HIGHWAYMEN FROM THEIR PLACE OF CONCEALMENT, AND SHOWS THEM A NEW MODE OF LEAVING THE PREMISES.

KNOWING that he could place the fullest trust in his dependant, old Matthew turned at once into the parlour, closing the door carefully, and, for greater security, slipping a small bolt into its socket.

Before opening the secret hiding-place to conceal the highwaymen therein, he had taken care, by a rapid glance at the only window in the room, to ascertain that the shutters were close shut, so that there could be no overlooking him from that quarter.

He placed his hand upon the mantelpiece, and looked steadfastly at the little clock.

Finding the signal remained unchanged, he rapidly pulled the fireplace out, and liberated our friends, who were not a little rejoiced to make their escape.

"Are they gone, Matthew?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"I believe so. At any rate, all we have to do is to watch the dial."

"Yes, I know; but if you will tell me the best way to do it, I will leave the place at once. The night is wearing on, and there is no time to be lost."

"True," said Matthew; "and yet I should recommend you to wait for a few moments, in case any of the officers should yet be lurking about."

"We will stay, Matthew, if you think it best, of course."

"Well, do so, and tell me what you think of your hiding-place."

"Oh, excellent, so far as security goes; but decidedly unpleasant if you have to remain in it."

"And especially with such a roaring fire as you have now," said Claude. "It was decidedly uncomfortable."

"And hot as an oven," said Sixteen-String Jack, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"You must not mind such little drawbacks as those," said Matthew. "Is it not an excellent idea?"

"Most excellent; and I should think would have occurred to no other person than yourself."

"Oh, I don't know," said Matthew, modestly. "I was looking at the chimney-piece one day, and the notion came into my head: so I set to work, and accomplished it all with my own hands."

"Did you, indeed?"

"I did; and worked so well, that, in spite of the perpetual interruptions to which the officers subject me, I succeeded in completing it without the knowledge being shared in by anyone save myself."

"Well, it has done us a good turn," cried Tom, "there's no doubt about that."

"None; and it has amply repaid me for the trouble of constructing it. But," he added, "did you not overhear the conversation I had with the officer?"

"We did," said Tom, looking at him, secretly; "every word of it."

"I thought you would," he answered, quietly. "You guessed my object in speaking as I did?"

"Well, scarcely."

"You did not think that I seriously intended to betray you?"

"No, no; I would never think that, Matthew, for if you played us false, we could never place dependence on any human being again."

"That's all right, then. It would have grieved me very much had you doubted me."

"But your object, Matthew, what was it?"

"Why, I thought if I pretended to fall in with their views that I should get on better than if I uttered a positive refusal. The officers, no doubt, will now hang off and on for a good while, expecting that, at the right moment, I shall deliver you into their hands. But there's no fear," he added; "I am only fooling them, as I have done many a time before."

"It was good policy to act in this manner," said Tom. "But now do you not think sufficient time has elapsed? I am growing uneasy, and anxious to leave."

"Yes, I think you may venture to go. But is there anything I can do for you during your absence?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Tom. "If I could only form some reasonable idea as to the contents of this letter, we should then be able to make a better arrangement. As it is, we must trust to chance, and leave things just as they are."

"Very well. But if there's any chance of my rendering you a service, don't fail to let me know."

"Rest assured of that. What time is it now?"

"Close upon half-past eleven."

"Is it indeed so late? Then it is really time we left, otherwise the Governor may not take it into his head to look at this letter till the morning."

"Come, then," said Matthew, taking down a key that was hanging on a nail, "you may as well go this way as any other."

While speaking, he advanced to the window, which he opened, and threw back the shutters.

"Now," he said "follow me through here and I will show you out by a fresh route."

With an agility and ease that, considering his size, were truly remarkable, old Matthew stepped on to a chair and passed through the window into the yard at the back.

The highwaymen followed immediately, and by his directions the window was closed again and the shutters put to.

"Now," he said, "there's a stable here, the existence of which is well enough known to the police, but the loft over it looks into a small yard at the back of a house in Blackmore Street. When you enter the stable, get up into the loft as quickly as possible, pass through the window I speak of, and drop into the yard just mentioned. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Then take this key, and with it unlock the door at the back of this house. Hang the key on a nail driven into the doorpost, and, having crossed the threshold, shut the door behind you, but don't fasten it on the inside."

"But what house is this, Matthew?"

"An empty one," he replied; "one that, by a lucky accident, was placed in my hands to let as soon as I could find a suitable tenant; but," he added with a chuckle, "it will be a long time before I find one, I'll warrant."

"You're sure the house is empty?" said Tom, laughing.

"Yes, quite sure. Walk boldly along the passage; there's nothing in the way, and you will come to the front door. It is fastened only by a latch, but that latch cannot be raised from the outside. Open the door cautiously, watch your opportunity, and emerge. Pull the door shut, and the latch will fasten itself. Then the rest depends upon yourselves."

"Thanks, Matthew—thanks," said Tom King; "you are indeed a friend well worth the having. By taking this route, surely we shall baffle the officers."

"I hope so," said Matthew, "yet it is impossible for me to say where they may be hiding at the present moment. Your chief care will be to keep yourselves as much out of sight as possible."

With this caution they parted, the highwaymen wringing Matthew's hand.

Successfully following his instructions, they soon entered the stable, mounted into the loft, and paused a moment at the little window, or, rather, opening in the wall, that he had described.

About eight feet below them was a small, dirty yard, bounded on each side by high brick walls, over which it would be difficult indeed for anyone to look.

A most profound silence reigned in this locality, and the tall buildings all around caused a deep darkness to prevail.

"It will be all right," said Tom, in a whisper. "I will go first; you can follow."

He rapidly lowered himself feet foremost from the window while he spoke, and, having hung for a second at the full length of his arms, he let go and alighted in safety in the yard beneath.

Then placing himself close against the wall so as to keep out of sight, he waited for his comrades to follow his example.

As may be guessed, they were not very long in doing so.

By this time their eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity, and they were able to see what they had not perceived before, namely, the back door of which Matthew had spoken.

Towards this they crept silently, for they were fearful that a footfall might betray them.

They were able all the time to keep close under the wall.

The door was opened by the key, and the key hung upon the door-post, according to the directions they had received.

That peculiar, damp, earthy smell that always pervades a shut-up, uninhabited house assailed their nostrils as soon as they crossed the threshold, and when the door was closed behind them the darkness was intense indeed—so intense that they would have had great diffidence in proceeding without a light, had not old Matthew so particularly assured them that there was nothing to fear in the shape of an obstruction.

A few paces brought them to the front door, for the house was a small one.

Tom listened while he placed his hand upon the latch.

All was still, and so he slowly opened the door to the extent of about a quarter of an inch.

It was well that he was thus cautious, for a heavy footstep on the pavement without reached their ears.

There was a flash of light, and a hoarse, wheezy voice, exclaimed:

"Half-past eleven, and a cloudy night."

It was a watchman going by, and the light from his lantern quickly faded away.

"That's lucky," said Tom; "it would have been awkward had he passed while we were just emerging. I think we can venture now; at any rate, I will go first."

Opening the door no wider than was actually necessary to allow his body to slip through, Tom passed out.

He was prepared to find that the door was a projecting one, so that he did not step at once into the street, but remained concealed by its deep shadow.

In a whisper he informed his friends of this, and they slipped quickly out.

"It's all right, I believe," said Tom. "I don't think there's a single police officer lurking near."

"Quick, then," said Claude—"the sooner we are out of here the better. Should we be seen it would look suspicious at once."

Tom assented, and at the same time obeyed.

Yet, as was proved, this was an unlucky movement.

The watchman's beat extended only to the end of Blackmore Street, and having reached it, he was returning with all speed to his comfortable watch-box at the corner of Drury Lane, in which he meant to enounce himself for the next half hour, leaving the street to look after itself.

Sauntering thus along, he was surprised by seeing the three highwaymen make their appearance so suddenly, as though they had sprung from the earth.

He knew there was no turning near, and was perfectly certain they had not walked down from the top of the street.

Advancing briskly to them, he held up his lantern, as he cried:

"Hullo—hullo! Where have you come from? Out of that empty house, I believe!"

"Be off!" said Claude. "What does it matter to you?"

"But I'll know who you are," said the watchman. "It's suspicious! Mind, or I'll spring my rattle! Who are you, I say?"

"Well, if you must know," answered Sixteen-String Jack, in a very hoarse, sepulchral voice, "it's the devil taking an evening walk with two of his friends. Good night to you!"

So saying, he struck the watchman's lantern from his shaking grasp, and passed quickly on, followed by his companions, and leaving the guardian of the night in a state of mingled bewilderment and dismay.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN PROCEED TO NEWGATE TO DELIVER THE KING'S MISSEIVE.

TURNING the corner of the street, the three highwaymen were quickly out of sight.

They drew down their hats over their brows, so as to conceal their features as much as possible, and then, in as steady, unconcerned a manner as they could assume, made their way towards Newgate.

It was a bold and adventurous act—one, in fact, scarcely excusable, and yet, after all, very likely to be successful from its sheer audacity.

Knowing that the prison was surrounded, and so closely watched by the police officers, one would have thought that it would be the very last place they would venture to approach.

The streets of London were well known to Tom and his comrades, and after a very little reflection they were able to decide within themselves which was the best route by which their destination should be reached.

They were anxious to avoid the principal thoroughfares, and yet by no means wishful to enter such as were rarely used, and in which their appearance could not fail to attract attention.

Yet as they walked onward, for the most part in silence, they fancied more than once that persons who passed them looked back curiously.

But, after all, this might have been more their own fancy than aught else.

Strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that they reached the Old Bailey in perfect safety, and without having been interrupted or questioned by anyone, and without having come into collision with any police officers.

At the corner of a narrow lane from which they emerged, and which was situated nearly opposite that part of the prison forming the residence of the Governor, they paused, and well they might, for an unexpected sight met their view.

Yet their surprise abated instantly, and they felt they might have known it had they given such a thing a moment's consideration.

The Old Bailey at this dark and lonely hour of the night presented a scene of unusual animation.

It was thronged by many persons, whose numbers increased every moment, for fresh spectators kept arriving from every street.

A noisy, dissolute crowd, it was composed of the worst specimens of humanity that the metropolis could then boast.

Some were wandering restlessly to and fro, others, with pipes in their mouths, were lounging in groups against the walls of the houses, and in every other place against which they could plant their backs.

Others, with wild cries and shouts, were amusing themselves by pushing violently through the throng, and whenever any accident occurred it was greeted by a roar of laughter.

Vendors of nearly all kinds of eatables and drinkables were there in considerable numbers, working their way backwards and forwards, and filling the air with their discordant shouts.

Some had torches, and others a brazier of blazing coals, the light from which shed a ruddy tint on all around.

Never before had the highwaymen beheld so strange a spectacle as this, and it was therefore almost unconsciously that they stood for some moments gazing at it.

Claude was the first to speak.

"Surely," he said, "this ought to be favourable to us. Can we not turn it to our advantage? Among all this confusion and noise, it is scarcely likely that



[OLD MATTHEW INTRODUCES A FRESH ALLY.]

we shall be noticed. Believe me, I think all things are favourable to the accomplishment of your design."

Tom nodded as he said:

"I think so too; the only thing is, that we should be careful in forcing our way through the throng."

"Yes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "there lies our danger. Some unexpected person may recognise us."

"We must run that risk," said Tom; "and the best way will be to put on as much indifference as we are able. Come, follow me—we will delay no longer."

Tom began slowly to push through the throng, and as if he had no particular object in doing so—as if he had no precise point he wished to reach, but seemed to be wandering listlessly about, like the majority of those present.

It was well that he had the presence of mind to act thus, for any injudicious haste would at once have had the effect of calling down special attention upon them.

No. 180.—BLACK BESS.

Short as was the distance, yet, owing to this cause, some time elapsed before the highwaymen got fairly in front of the Governor's house.

But for this they cared not, for up to the present all had gone well.

Now, however, came their greatest danger.

Looking right and left, they could perceive many police officers, who were bent with exemplary closeness upon the duty that had been set them.

The fact was that there was not one of them who did not believe in his heart that the night would not prove over without Dick Turpin making some effort to liberate himself.

In such a case, they were animated by the hope they would be instrumental in recapturing him—not in case of any reward, but merely for the credit of the whole body of police officers.

In ascending the steps of the Governor's house

standing for a moment at the door, Tom felt there would be the utmost peril;—he could not fail to be noticed then by many.

For one thing, he was not aware that the officers had made up their minds to pay no attention whatever to anything that took place in the Old Bailey; nor, indeed, were they likely to trouble themselves about anyone who sought admission to the prison. Their chief solicitude would be to prevent any person from leaving it.

Slowly moving forward, as if he had no such design, Tom King suddenly turned round and ascended the flight of stone steps, his eyes fixed upon the brass handle of the bell, and he pulled it vigorously.

In Newgate, all doors were promptly answered, and scarcely had the tinkling of the bell died away than this front door was thrown open, and a man appeared upon the threshold.

"The Governor," said Tom, disguising his voice—"I want to see him immediately, upon important business."

"Then you can't."

"But I must," said Tom, placing his foot in such a position against the doorpost that the man could not close the door. "I must see him on most urgent business, and beware how you refuse me!"

"But I tell you you can't, and there's an end of it! Wait till to-morrow!"

"Never!" said Tom. "I don't move from here until the Governor comes!"

"What's all this?" said another voice at this moment—"what's all this, I say—what is it?"

The man at the door fell back immediately into an attitude of respect.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said—"humbly beg pardon!"

"But what is it—what is it?" said the same voice, in snappish, querulous tones.

"You are the Governor, I presume?" said Tom, making a profound bow while he spoke.

"Yes, yes!" replied Mr. Bradbury. "But, confound it all, why can't you say what it is!"

"Well, then," said Tom, "I have to deliver this bag, which, I believe, comes from the King?"

"The what?"

"The King. A short time ago one of the King's messengers met with an accident while riding here at full speed. I happened to be near, and asked if I could be of any assistance. He gave me this bag, and entreated me to deliver it to the Governor of Newgate with all speed, as it contained a missive from the King of a most important character."

The Governor looked rather amazed, and seemed to shrink from taking hold of the leather bag.

"That is all," said Tom; "and, not liking to refuse his request, especially as my own business was bringing me to London, I promised to deliver it according to his request; and here it is, and that's all I know about it."

The Governor took the bag.

"Will you walk in, sir," he said, "while I look at the contents?"

Tom felt strongly inclined to say yes, but, fearful of the consequences of such a mad proceeding, he restrained himself, and answered, in an indifferent tone:

"No thank you, Mr. Governor, I am much obliged to you for your hospitality all the same, but the delivery of this letter-bag has already brought me considerably out of my way, and as my time is short I cannot afford to spare any more from my own concerns."

"Good evening then," said the Governor, retiring.

"Good evening," said Tom, hastily descending the steps.

The door was closed, and the highway n mingled with the throng.

Luckily this little incident as scarcely noticed, for the popular attention was at then diverted by a pitched battle between two men who had rapidly changed from words to blows.

The wice officers who were nearest looked on, but saw nothing peculiar or suspicious, and, as before, continued to give their best attention to the walls of the prison.

The idea that Tom King should be there delivering anything to the Governor was so monstrous a one that

it was not likely to occur to the minds of any of them.

But, Laving been successful so far, the highwaymen now became a prey to the greatest anxiety.

Drifting with the throng of persons, they hastily exchanged a few cautious observations.

"What will be the result?" said Tom. "How is this to end? How fearfully short the time is now until the hour appointed for execution."

"Don't think of that, but pin your faith upon the King's honour; I don't think you will have occasion to repent it."

"I trust not."

"Above all things," said Sixteen-String Jack, "don't let us get far away. If, as I take it, that letter contains an order to the Governor to release Dick Turpin immediately he will do so, and when he appears he will doubtless require all the aid we shall be able to afford him."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that," said Tom: "let us turn back again and be on the look-out."

Accordingly they did so, and as minute after minute slowly passed away the suspense that they suffered increased to an alarming degree.

So absorbed were they by one thought that they became altogether unmindful of themselves, and forgot all about looking to see whether they were noticed.

At each instant, too, they kept creeping nearer and nearer to the door of the Governor's house, for somehow, without knowing exactly why, they fancied this would be the route by which Dick Turpin would leave the prison.

But from the length of time that elapsed, their hopes sank down to zero, and, without daring to confess it, each felt in his own mind a disagreeable conviction that the letter they had been at such pains to deliver did not concern Dick Turpin at all.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXVIII.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES WATCH IN VAIN FOR THE APPEARANCE OF DICK TURPIN.

It was at this moment that the huge clock of St. Paul's Cathedral proclaimed the hour of one.

The highwaymen started and looked uneasily at each other as they heard the sound, because then they knew that a full hour had elapsed since the delivery of the letter.

What, then, were they to think of so long an interval?

What other conclusion could they come to than that which had already fixed itself in their minds?

So far as they could tell, the gloomy prison bore its accustomed look, and there were no tokens that anything of an unusual character was taking place inside.

The people in the street grew, if anything, more turbulent, and the police officers more alert and watchful.

Tom drew a little on one side, as if to address his comrades, but at that moment Claude Duval said, in a hasty, impressive whisper:

"Tom—Tom, I am afraid we are seen and recognised!"

"How so?—how—how?" cried his two companions.

"Why, there's a police officer yonder—don't look at him—I have seen him staring at us for some time past, and now he has whispered to one of his comrades. They are suspicious."

"What is to be done?"

"We have no help but to mingle in the throng, which is fortunately growing more dense every moment."

"But we shall leave the door."

"That cannot be helped. Come—come, as you value your own safety and mine!"

With these words, Claude turned round and pushed his way among the mass of people.

Tom King and Jack kept him in view and followed, for they were by no means desirous that a separation should ensue.

It was a fortunate thought of Claude's, and, under the circumstances, no better means could have been found of escaping the observation of the officers.

In less than a moment they were completely swallowed up and lost in the seething mass of human beings.

The highwaymen sought for the thickest of the crowd, and as they made no movements calculated to attract the attention of those around, and as there was nothing remarkable in their appearance, they escaped all comment and notice.

When near to the opposite side of the street, and being, as they believed, out of sight of all of the officers, they ventured to make a stand.

Looking across the dark thoroughfare, they could just perceive the Governor's front door, looking like a black patch, a little darker than the walls of the prison itself.

Yet while standing there, they felt assured that the door could not be opened unseen by them.

Moreover, there was an additional advantage accruing from this change of position, for they were now able to command a view of about the only other exit from Newgate—namely, the door at which the prisoners were admitted.

Over the upper portion of this door a light came, as usual, be seen burning, and that was about the only sign there was that the place was inhabited at all.

But another half hour elapsed, and no alteration in the aspect of affairs took place.

And now it may be said that the alarm and anxiety of the highwaymen had reached the highest point.

"The King has proved faithless," murmured Tom—"we can place no other construction upon it. Had it been an order for Dick's liberation he would have been free long ere now."

"That's my opinion," said Claude.

"And mine also," assented Jack.

"Then, such being the case, how are we to act? We must not remain here with our hands tied behind us, as it were, but take active measures, for on no account must the captain perish."

"On no account," said Claude. "Yet, how very weak and powerless we are against authority."

"True," said Tom, sadly. "If the worst comes to the worst we must make an effort; but, alas! I fear it will be a vain one."

"It must not be made with that spirit," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or failure is certain. Shall we remain waiting here any longer, or shall we endeavour to enlist the sympathies of the family in our behalf?"

"Let us think—let us think."

Again there was a silence, and although the highwaymen had expressed themselves so positively, yet they could not help feeling a faint hope that, after all, Dick would be released.

It was a hope to be clung to to the last, and in this state of hopeful indecision another half hour wore away.

It was now two o'clock, and the ringing sounds aroused them all from their abstraction.

"We must be quick," said Claude. "If we wait much longer I question whether we shall have a chance of meeting any of the family. They have twice done us good service, recollect," he added, "and perhaps they may again."

"Let it be so, then," said Tom; "and as I come to think upon it my opinion is, that the best course to pursue will be for one to go on this errand to the family, another to remain here, and the third to proceed to old Matthew's in Drury Lane, in whom I feel the utmost confidence."

"Good—that's a sensible suggestion! Now, without further delay, let us decide who is to remain and who is to go."

"Then," said Tom, "if you, Claude, will consent to visit the family I should like to remain here, watching for Dick, and Jack can go to Drury Lane."

"Agreed!" they both cried; and Claude added:

"It will be better for me to go to the ken, because I have already been on that business before."

With these words they separated.

Tom King, choosing the darkest place that he could find—a spot where one house, projecting beyond another, made a shadowy corner—took up his post, determined to wait with unremitting care.

But all his watching went for naught.

The crowd gradually increased in bulk, the clocks continued to chime forth at every quarter of an hour, but still no other alteration in the aspect of affairs took place.

No door was opened—no person emerged from Newgate.

Oh, how terribly uneasy Tom King felt, and, at the same time, how powerless!

Really it seemed to him as though his comrade was on this occasion destined to take his last look at life.

No words, however powerful and well chosen, could ever convey an adequate idea of the state of his feelings on that dreadful night.

Three—four—five—six o'clock sounded.

Still there was no change, nor did his companions return.

Then seven o'clock struck, and by that time a dusky kind of light filled all the street, and made the black prison opposite look gloomier and more soul-chilling than ever.

Then, glancing around, Tom perceived Sixteen-String Jack at no great distance, and, by his manner, he was evidently searching for him.

Moving from his place of concealment, Tom, watching an opportunity when Jack's gaze was turned in that direction, made a rapid sign.

A recognition instantly followed, and he fell back.

A moment afterwards, and he was rejoined by Jack.

"You are securely hid here," he said. "For the last two hours I have been vainly searching for you, and forcing my way through the mob. Such a crowd surely was never known in London before. Should you wish to leave it now you would find it would take you a full hour to do so."

"Indeed!" said Tom, wearily and sadly. "And what says Matthew?"

"He could say nothing—nothing, at least, of any value. But he is almost distracted by the imminence of the danger, yet I can tell by his manner that he is ready to abandon all hope."

"And so am I," said Tom. "Where is Claude—have you seen him?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Let us hope, then, that he will bring us good intelligence."

"Yes, that's our only chance. But we stand too much in the shade for him to see us, should he work his way through the crowd to this point."

"Shall we shift to a more open part?"

"No, no—not now. It is growing lighter, and we should be careful how we show ourselves."

"True, Tom—true. But I am so excited, and Dick's danger appears so very great that all others sink at once into insignificance when compared with it."

"Yes, you are right. But look around you, can you see nothing of him?"

"Nothing whatever."

The hour of eight now pealed forth, and a man standing near the highwaymen, exclaimed to those near him:

"They're at breakfast now, I suppose! Well, I don't care how soon it's over."

"It isn't long to wait now," said another voice. "Ah, look! here come the sheriffs!"

A great commotion at this moment took place, and from the lower end of the Old Bailey there came loud shouts and cries.

Neither Tom nor Jack could resist the temptation of looking in this direction, and then they caught sight of the horses, the gorgeous carriages, and the servants in their gaudy liveries.

They paused for a moment near the Sessions House, then a gate was thrown open, and the carriages rolled into the court-yard.

"One more hour," said the man who had before spoken, "and we shall begin to see something; it generally takes about an hour."

Oh! now full of anxiety and alarm were Dick's two comrades then!

They felt as though impelled to dash themselves against the hard stone walls of Newgate.

With eyes bloodshot with gazing steadfastly so long, they continued to look upon the building before them.

It must not be lost sight of that in these days executions took place generally about noon, and not at an early hour, as is the custom at the present day.

At nine, or shortly afterwards, if the crowd was very dense, the procession usually started, and made its way, at

a slow, walking pace, towards Tyburn, which was rarely reached before the hour of twelve.

As nine o'clock approached, then, the highwaymen and all the crowd became more impatient and excited than ever.

By this time, too, the dimensions of the crowd were mething terrible to think of.

As far as ever the eye could reach, in all directions, people were jammed together as closely as was possible, and the windows and roofs of the contiguous houses presented nothing but one mass of faces.

Most of the spectators, too, grew more violent and demonstrative.

But the huge uproar ceased as if by magic.

The hour of nine was struck by St. Sepulchre's clock, and then, with breathless eagerness, all eyes were turned towards the huge folding doors, through which the procession would issue.

A few moments only must elapse, and then those gates would be thrown back.

Already in imagination they could see everything in readiness for the start.

"The moment has come," said Tom, turning his haggard face towards his companions. "Can nothing be done?"

An impatient murmur rose from the crowd, and increased in sound as they found minute after minute elapsed without the opening of the doors.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXIX.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN AND OLD MATTHEW GIVE THEMSELVES UP TO DESPAIR.

CLAUDE DUVAL, on separating himself from his companions, made his way at once to the Jew's Harp, in Hanging Sword Alley, where, as will be remembered, he met the "Family" on a former occasion, when he enlisted their services on Dick's behalf.

But upon reaching this locality, he found, to his great disappointment, that immense alterations had taken place, and of the well-known thieves' ken not a trace remained.

The fact was, it had been broken up by the police officers some months before.

But of this fact Claude Duval was quite ignorant.

This disappointment was in truth most distressing, for the time was growing so fast towards morning.

He was beginning even to have some doubts whether this night was a meeting night at all; but remembering that the Three Tuns in Seven Dials was a well-known resort, he determined to hurry there, in the hope of success.

But here again he met with disappointment.

Making himself known to the landlord of the place, he was at once warmly received; but in answer to his inquiries, he was informed that no meeting of the family had taken place that night, or would, and that most of the members were scattered over the country.

Knowing that he could place the fullest trust in this man, Claude sought his advice.

But the landlord only shook his head by way of reply; but being pressed still further, he answered, at length:

"Well, then, if you must know, it is my deliberate opinion that the captain has reached the end of his race. I have nothing to say against him myself, except that he carried things off with rather too high a hand to please me; but that's neither here nor there."

"And can you offer no suggestion?"

"None whatever. The Government has made up its mind to hang him, and hang him they will. Mark my words—they will come true."

"I hope not," said Claude, and he once more sought the open air.

He paced irresolutely now, uncertain which should be his next step to take.

But after much reflection, he could think of nothing better than making his way to old Matthew's in Drury Lane.

He regretted now that he had not repaired there in the first instance.

The distance was not great, and he arrived just after Sixteen-String Jack had taken his departure.

He found old Matthew in a dreadful state of agitation.

Sixteen-String Jack had told him of his errand.

"No luck, then, Claude?" he said, as soon as he caught sight of his face. "The expression of it is enough—you need not tell me."

"But, Matthew," exclaimed Claude, with great earnestness and warmth, "you are a man of great resources, as I know full well. Is it possible that in this emergency you can find yourself quite aground?"

"It is," said Matthew, with a groan. "I don't believe any living human being could devise anything to save him from his fate. You see, those in power have made up their minds to his execution, and how is it possible for us to prevent it?"

"How I regret that we troubled ourselves about the locket at all—that has been nothing but lost time."

"And it has tied your hands behind your backs as well," said Matthew, "for you kept waiting and waiting for that when you ought to have been actively engaged."

"Yes—yes, I can see my mistake now plain enough; but yet it is terrible to think of Dick being led forth to execution and us being unable to aid him."

"It is indeed," said Matthew. "I have only just been told that a fresh detachment of troops has been sent down to Tyburn to reinforce those already there. From this," he added, "it would seem as though there was a suspicion a rescue would be attempted, and against well-armed, disciplined soldiers what chance would the populace have?"

Claude sank down in a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

Old Matthew tried to say something about never despair, but failing in the attempt, sat down also, in an attitude very similar to Claude's.

Thus they remained for some time, until the highwayman, suddenly starting to his feet, exclaimed:

"But this will never do, Matthew—never—never!"

"We may as well remain thus," said the landlord, in a broken voice—"we can do no good."

"I don't know that," said Claude. "If we cannot save him we can at least perish in making the attempt, desperate and fool-hardy as it may seem. I, for one, will endeavour to set him free, even if at the last moment."

"And so will I," said Matthew—"so will I. Just wait a moment—I will put on my coat, and we will be off to Newgate together."

Matthew quickly donned his coat and hat, and then, leaving the house to take care of itself, accompanied Claude towards the Old Bailey.

Long before they got anywhere near this thoroughfare, they found themselves surrounded by a vast crowd through which they with great difficulty forced themselves, for every step had to be vigorously contested.

The crowd was even denser and greater than Sixteen-String Jack had represented it to be.

All were anxious to get in such a position as would enable them to command a view of the procession when it started, and those who had got anywhere near resolutely refused to allow another to pass them.

It was only, then, by dint of the greatest exertions that Claude and Matthew managed to progress at all.

It was shortly after the hour of nine—about the time when the silence that had fallen on the multitude was succeeded by a hoarse murmur—that old Matthew and Claude found themselves at length on the spot they wished to reach.

Glancing keenly around, Matthew made out the form of Sixteen-String Jack, and at once pushed towards him.

In another moment they were all standing in a group.

Tom and Jack had ventured to indulge in the hope that these new-comers had brought with them welcome intelligence.

But they were quickly disappointed.

"The time has come," murmured Tom King. "Surely in another moment at the most the gates will be thrown open. We shall catch one sight of him then I hope."

"The delay is extraordinary," said Sixteen-String Jack. "And look how excited and tumultuous the people are becoming! Shall we look upon this delay as a good or a bad omen?"

No one ventured to reply, and with an ever-increasing interest they turned their eyes towards the gate.

The air was now rent by violent cries proceeding from lusty throats.

Their patience was quite tired out at having waited for so long.

All their vociferations, however, were not productive of any effect.

While they shouted and bawled, time went relentlessly on.

The finger of St. Sepulchre's Church clock, at which ever and anon rapid glances were cast, moved slowly and steadily onward until the half hour was once more reached.

No one could be more perplexed at this strange circumstance than were the highwaymen and their friend the landlord.

Strive as they would, they could come to no plausible solution of it.

Ten o'clock came, and yet there were no more signs of the gates opening than there had been hours before.

The behaviour of the populace now partook very much of the nature of a riot.

Cries were raised that the gates should be battered down and the prisoner brought forth.

All at once there was another sudden change in the behaviour of the mob.

A whisper was passed from mouth to mouth almost with the speed of electricity, and spreading like some huge wave, reached the uttermost verge of the crowd.

That whisper consisted of four words, and those four words were:

"Dick Turpin has escaped."

The highwaymen started so violently upon receiving this intelligence, and showed so much surprise, that it is a wonder they escaped suspicion, and the fact can only be accounted for by the preoccupation of everyone.

"Escaped!" murmured Tom, between his lips, and looking as startled as though he had been told Newgate had been swallowed up by an earthquake—"escaped! How? Impossible!"

"So I fear," said Claude Duval. "How can such a thing be true?"

"Have you kept good watch, Tom?" asked old Matthew.

"The very best, and I will swear at any moment that since I delivered the letter last night no living person has left the prison."

"Well, well," said Matthew—"this is more than strange; but let me advise you to cast it from your minds, not to buoy yourselves up with hopes which are sure to be fallacious. It is some idle tale invented by some one to account for the delay. No, no—such news is too good to be true. Dick Turpin has not escaped."

But the remark was repeated again and again.

Another hour passed away, and the gates were not opened.

Then, indeed, it seemed as if there was some foundation for the report, for how would the execution take place at the appointed time?

Then such cries and groans of disappointment as arose from the vast mob had surely never been heard before.

They considered they were cheated, deceived, and were exasperated accordingly.

"Dare we believe it?" said Claude Duval, just after the clock struck. "Dare we place any faith in this assertion?"

"I don't know," said Matthew—"it seems very strange; and if I thought I could only force my way through the crowd I would endeavour to put the question to some of the officers or officials of the prison. At any rate, I will try," he added—"I can do no harm. Wait here, and I shall know where to find you."

The highwaymen made no opposition to his departure.

By gentl insinuating himself in between the closely-packed people, old Matthew performed what seemed to be an impossibility, for he proved that there was room for yet one more among them.

But his dimensions were so great that people instinctively shrank back to allow him passage, hoping he would get further away, in order that they might be relieved from the extra pressure.

And in this manner—although it was a very tedious operation—Matthew actually succeeded in getting to the opposite side of the Old Bailey.

Upon arriving there he found a scene of great excitement and animation going forward.

The police officers had congregated into a huge group, and were conversing eagerly.

To most of them old Matthew was known, yet they were so absorbed in their conversation that they did not perceive him.

Venturing at last to touch one on the shoulder, Matthew said:

"What's this extraordinary tale I have just heard—is there any truth in it?"

The police officer eyed him suspiciously.

"I fancy you had a hand in it," he said. "It passes my comprehension."

"What?" asked Matthew, with a fast-beating heart.

"Why, how he could have escaped."

"Then he has escaped?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; I believe we can entertain no doubt upon that point, though how and by what means we cannot imagine."

"It seems to me incredible," said Matthew. "I can't believe it even now. I thought the prison was to be closely watched by the whole force of police officers."

"And so it has; we have formed a circle round the building, one man being almost within reach of the other. I am certain not one has been negligent in his duty; every part of the outside of Newgate has been watched, and how Dick Turpin has escaped I can't make out, for no person has left the prison. Yet I am told that when they opened his cell no trace of him could be seen."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXX.

DICK'S ESCAPE FROM NEWGATE CONTINUES TO BE A PROFOUND MYSTERY, AND OLD MATTHEW INTRODUCES A SINGULAR PERSONAGE.

THIS intelligence filled old Matthew with amazement, and, finding nothing more was to be gleaned, he turned round, and with infinite difficulty fought his way back to where he had left the highwaymen.

On the present occasion, however, his task was by no means so difficult as it had been, for the people were really beginning to believe that Dick Turpin had escaped, and accordingly were gradually separating.

Matthew's first words on rejoining the three friends were:

"Follow me—be quick; there's no good in remaining here any longer, and you had better retire before the crowd breaks up."

"But Dick," said Tom—"is it possible that he has escaped?"

"I believe it is true," said Matthew, with a smile, "and that's the same thing; but I am going to think about it."

They walked on rapidly through the streets.

Old Matthew led the way until, having got near to Drury Lane, Tom said:

"Had we not better go in here where we left our horses? Will it not be dangerous to go to your house?"

"No, I think not," was his answer. "If I can guard against your being seen, why, you know, I have a hiding-place that will baffle the closest search."

"I leave all to you," said Tom; "but be quick, for I am anxious to know the result of your cogitations."

Matthew walked boldly up White Horse Yard, and, finding no one was about to observe their movements, opened the little door in the wall.

"We're all right," he said; "but I should advise you to remain in the yard until I have seen that the coast is quite clear inside."

The highwaymen consented, standing so as to be out of sight of anyone who might look through the windows.

Matthew was absent only a moment, then he reappeared and beckoned them.

"All's right," he said, "there's not an officer in sight."

He conducted them straight to the parlour and made them acquainted with just what had passed between himself and the officers.

"Incomprehensible and incredible, as it may appear," he concluded, "I suppose it is really true that Dick Turpin has escaped, though how he has managed to do so is positively marvellous. If he has gone, all will be well, and I should recommend you to stay here till nightfall; if he has not, we shall have quicker tidings of it here than elsewhere."

"But," said Tom, "can we not set it down as impossible—as some mistake? Closely watched as the prison has been, how can he have left it?"

Old Matthew put his finger by the side of his nose with a very wise expression.

Then glancing around and speaking in a suppressed tone, he said:

"I have an idea."

"An idea? but of what kind?"

"About this affair. I may be wrong, you know, but yet I have been putting two and two together."

"Go on, Matthew," said the others, feverish with impatience, for they knew how great were his powers in arriving at the solution of any difficulty.

"Well," he said, "I incline to the belief that the King acted in good faith after all, and that the letter you delivered was to the effect that Dick Turpin should be released. But didn't the King tell you," he added, turning to Tom, "that it was not in his power to grant a proper pardon because of the strong feeling his ministers had on the subject?"

"Yes, he certainly said that, or something to the same effect."

"Just so. Well, then, under the circumstances, what would be the most probable letter he would address to the Governor? If you observe, the messenger appeared to have been sent off with some secrecy; you might judge that by the time of night. Then the letter might command the Governor to let Dick out of Newgate somehow, secretly—stating that the Governor would be held free from the consequences of such an act."

Tom clapped his hands together.

"You have hit it, Matthew," he cried, enthusiastically—"you have hit it! Now you speak, all comes over me with the full force of conviction. That's it—we ought to have thought of it before."

Old Matthew shook his head.

"It's only an idea, understand," he said, "and it may be a very long way off the truth, yet to me there seems a very strong degree of probability about it."

"There seems something more than probability to me," said Tom.

"And to us also," added his two companions.

"Certainly," said Matthew, "it solves all our difficulties at once, and if I only knew for certain that Dick had escaped I should feel more confidence in it than ever."

"Well, we must try and ascertain that; but if Dick has escaped, surely he would make his way to Ealing."

"Yes, it may be that he is already there."

"Let us start off at once," cried Tom.

"No—no," replied Matthew; "restrain yourself; don't be blind to your own danger; it will be quite difficult enough for you to make your way here by dark, and as the day now is half gone I should recommend you to stay, besides, by nightfall, we shall have certain information."

With some difficulty the highwaymen allowed themselves to be persuaded by their old friend.

Matthew also entreated them to use their best endeavours to get a little repose.

He assured them that they would be in perfect safety, as he would watch over them personally, and give them timely warning of the approach of danger.

It was soon after this that he left them, and, by dint of making inquiries in various directions, received confirmation of the intelligence that had already been imparted to him.

The execution had not certainly taken place, and he felt tolerably sure that it would not be delayed except from some such cause as that named.

About dusk he again sought the parlour.

But looking in, he perceived that the three highwaymen were all sleeping soundly.

On making this discovery he closed the door softly.

"Let them stay," he murmured; "it is better thus; they will awake thoroughly refreshed, and equal to any emergency that may arise."

On that particular night old Matthew felt no very great apprehension of a visit from the police officers.

It was rarely indeed that they visited his premises two days running.

Some might be watching around, but yet, if such was the case, he had good hopes of eluding the highwaymen out unseen.

Claude Duval was the first to awake.

He had fallen off to sleep unconsciously, and for a moment could scarcely make out where he was.

For one thing the darkness confused him, but in awaking he aroused his two comrades, and they, like himself, could scarcely believe that night had come.

Directly after this Matthew paid them another visit.

"You are awake now, I see," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, yes—but the news?"

"Good," was the answer. "The execution has not taken place to-day, and on every hand I receive nothing but confirmation of the news that Dick Turpin has been successful in making his escape, though how on earth he has managed it baffles everybody."

Simultaneously the three highwaymen drew long breaths of relief.

"It is at least a great comfort to know," said Tom King, "that there has been no execution at Tyburn to-day. I consider that points conclusively to the fact that Dick has escaped from Newgate; had he been safe in his prison the sentence of the law would most certainly have been carried out."

"I incline to that opinion too," said old Matthew; and it is my belief that if you will mount your horses and ride off to the Three Spiders, that you will find him there awaiting your arrival."

"Then let us go at once," said Claude, with great energy. "I am full of curiosity to know first whether this good news is really true, and if so, by what mysterious agency Dick got out of Newgate."

"That you will be sure to learn from his own lips," said Matthew, smiling; "and I suppose, as it is quite dark and altogether an uncomfortable night, I shall not be able to persuade you to stay with me any longer."

"No—no, Matthew," returned Tom, "not a moment longer, yet before we leave we must express to you how grateful we are for what you have done in our behalf."

"Pooh—pooh!"

"It's all very fine to say pooh, pooh, Matthew, but that doesn't alter the case in the least. Look at this last hiding-place of yours, for instance—it most assuredly saved us, and yet you could not have constructed it without great expense and trouble."

"And you think I mind either. No, no—not a bit."

"Well, Matthew," continued Tom, "I have made up my mind to this as soon as I see the captain; I shall relate everything to him, and then we shall decide upon a testimonial of some sort which we shall insist upon your acceptance of."

"Well," returned old Matthew, "if you put it in that light I don't mind. And now, then, where do you say you left your horses?"

The place was described.

"Did you think of going for them yourselves?"

"What do you think?"

"Why, that it would be unwise."

"Who shall we send, then?"

"I have a little fellow here who will perform the task to your entire satisfaction."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Oh, yes, he ought to be. I knew his father well in years gone by, and befriended him on many occasions. This is his only child; he is an orphan, and unfortunately both deaf and dumb."

"Then he ought to be faithful."

"Yes; if he only takes after his father he will be faithful enough in all conscience, but I am not afraid."

"Well, then, will you send him?"

"I will."

"At once?"

"Yes. Should you like to see him?"

"If you have no objection."

"None in the least."

Old Matthew left the parlour, and shortly afterwards returned with a boy about fourteen years of age.

He was a very singular specimen of humanity indeed, with short legs, long arms, and a disproportionate head and body.

He was attired with that gaudiness which generally characterises deformed persons.

In his own opinion he was of great importance indeed, yet, as he followed old Matthew into the room something after the manner of an obedient dog, there was a peculiar shuffle in his gait, a bend in his shoulders, and a restless

expression about his eyes that by no means prepossessed the highwaymen with his appearance.

His wide mouth was parted in a grin, and with his fingers he played with the huge polished metal buttons upon his vest.

By way of greeting he made a general salaam to all assembled, and yet as he made it his eyes, so quick and restless, took in every peculiarity in the highwaymen's appearance at one single glance.

Then, folding his arms, he stood in an attitude as much as to say:

"I am here—what do you want with me?"

CHAPTER DCCLXXXI.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES MEET WITH A DISAPPOINTMENT ON THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE THREE SPIDERS.

OLD MATTHEW waited a moment in order that the highwaymen might look well at the messenger.

Then making a sign to attract his attention, Matthew rapidly, with his fingers, instructed the boy to go to the stable and fetch the horses, bringing them towards the bottom of White Horse Yard.

He made a low bow and retired, not, however, until he had taken another good look at the three highwaymen.

"Well," said Matthew, as soon as the door had closed behind him, "what do you think of him—he is a queer-looking customer, is he not?"

"Very queer," said Tom King, "and I don't mind saying, something very disagreeable and unpleasant indeed."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, very."

"Oh, that's only the first effect—it quickly wears off."

"Can he be trusted?" asked Tom, very earnestly.

"Certainly."

"Are you sure? Have you ever put him to the test?"

"Well, I can't say I have," returned Matthew, thoughtfully, "for, candidly speaking, I never trust anybody more than I can help, and since I have had Manuel I have never required his services particularly."

"Well," pursued Tom, "I may be mistaken, but if there is not treachery in him I am greatly deceived, so all that I can say is, be on your guard."

"I shall, you may depend."

"What, now, if he betrayed us?"

"Don't suppose such a thing!" exclaimed Matthew, with a start. "No—no," he added, "he would never be guilty of such baseness as that! He is a good boy, and he knows what I have done for his father, and is also aware that I am the only friend he has on earth."

"I may be doing him an injustice," said Tom King. "I hope I am, and yet I fear that you are allowing yourself to be led away by some feeling of attachment that you had for his parent."

Old Matthew was silent, as if these words had thrown him into a reverie.

Rousing himself, however, he said:

"It's a long story, and some day I may tell you all about it."

"About what?"

"About Manuel and his father, and how he came into my charge."

"We will not stop now, at any rate," said Claude Duval—"I am all impatience to be gone. Come, we may as well get outside and meet Manuel on the road."

"Yes, that's just what I intended," said Tom King, "and am quite ready."

"Farewell, then," cried old Matthew, as he led them into the back yard—"farewell! Remember me to the captain; tell him that I am glad he has got so nicely out of his difficulty, and say I shall be glad to see him whenever there is a chance."

"I will, Matthew," said Tom King, grasping his hand. "And now, once more, many thanks, and farewell for the present."

"Farewell!" said Matthew. "I am sorry you are going."

Claude and Jack also said good-bye, and the latter, as he parted from him at the little doorway, added—

"I hope we shall find our horses all right with your dumb friend; but I confess I fully share in Tom King's doubts, and, as a mere matter of caution, I only ask you

to watch him carefully, and not to trust him with any secret until you have thoroughly tested him."

"Leave me alone for that!" exclaimed old Matthew. "I shall look upon this service to-night as some guarantee of his fidelity; it remains to be seen how he will perform it."

With these words the highwaymen departed, old Matthew closing the door in the wall quickly, lest any prying eyes should be abroad.

When he had said it was a rainy, disagreeable night he had only spoken the truth.

The sky was completely covered up by thick, heavy clouds, and the rain fell with the slow steadiness that seemed to promise a long continuance of it.

The wind blew bleakly down the narrow passage, and the highwaymen were glad enough to get out of it.

"We have a dirty night before us," said Claude, "yet it's all the better for that, as we are less likely to be pursued or interrupted, and I am anxious that we should make our way to Ealing with all speed."

"So am I," said Tom. "Hark!"

The faint clatter of horses' hoofs came upon his ears.

"There are our steeds!" he cried. "Follow me. The sooner we join them the better."

Hastening forward while he spoke, and trusting to his companions to follow his example, Tom crossed the street, and plunged down another.

The boy was only just leaving the stables.

He was leading out the horses.

They were at his side before he was aware of it.

Tom took a crown-piece from his pocket, and slipped it into his hand.

But the deaf and dumb boy seemed strangely absent and unobservant of what the highwaymen were doing.

Those keen dark eyes of his were peering through the darkness in all directions.

The highwaymen lost no time in mounting; but scarcely had they done so than a shrill whistle was blown, and the sound of horses' feet could be heard.

"The officers," said Tom—"the officers are upon us! Quick! Follow me, and I doubt not we shall outrun them."

Tom turned his horse's head in the direction of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, that being the nearest route by which he could hope to gain the open country.

The officers, in strong force, made their appearance at the same moment.

Glancing back and seeing this, Tom exclaimed:

"It strikes me our suspicions were right after all! That boy has not placed the officers on our track, it's odd to me!"

"It is very strange that they should appear so suddenly," said Claude; "and yet, had they been informed surely they would have taken better measures for our capture."

"I don't know that," was the reply. "It would be easy for him to give the news to one who would hurry off for assistance."

"True," said Jack. "And did you not notice that he had ample time to perform his errand and yet was only just leaving the stables? His calculation may have been that he would have to wait for us at the corner of White Horse Yard, and he would have loitered with the horses until he was sure the officers were there."

"It makes me feel quite uncomfortable to think of it," said Claude Duval, "and yet let us hope that we're mistaken."

"Hark!" said Tom King. "Now they are after us in good earnest! Urge your horses to the utmost, and let us out-distance them as quickly as we can."

Just while he spoke the officers came in view behind them in a dense throng.

Some little delay had somehow taken place in getting fairly in pursuit of the highwaymen, but at length they had succeeded in getting a fair start.

One cause of this delay was that all the officers knew well enough the resolute character of the men they were in hopes of capturing, and this made them desirous of all keeping close together in a body for protection.

There were some who could have joined in the pursuit before the rest, but this they shrank from doing out of personal considerations, and they trusted that, while keeping all together, they should yet be successful in running the highwaymen down.

Our friends' horses, however, had been well attended to during their absence, and the long rest they had had made them just ready for a good gallop.

Never before indeed did they appear to be possessed of so much vigour and mettle, and they tore along the silent streets at a speed that was positively alarming.

Yet, with a dogged perseverance, the police officers kept on their trail, and it was not until London was left behind and the country fairly gained that the three highwaymen succeeded in quite shaking off their pursuers.

Then Tom King, reining up suddenly, and wheeling his horse round, listened attentively.

The wind, rushing through the branches of the trees, made a rustling noise, enough to drown any faint sound.

But Tom's ears were sharp and well practiced, and after a moment's pause he exclaimed:

"I think all's well, Claude; I can hear nothing!"

"Nor I."

"Then now is the time to change our route. Quick—forward!"

"You are more impatient to reach the Three Spiders than I am."

Turning off completely at right angles from the course they had been pursuing, they made their way in almost a straight line for their destination.

Even if the officers should be somewhere in the rear, and still keeping up the pursuit, this sudden change of direction would inevitably have the effect of baffling them.

For the rest of the distance not another word was exchanged, and although there was now no particular danger behind them, yet the horses were not suffered to relax their speed.

At length, entering the little plantation, they pushed on towards the stables, and when near them, stopped to look up.

The signal light was burning steadily but dimly in the little window, and, reassured by this, and drawing hopeful conclusions from it, they set about entering the stable without more delay.

The door was only shut to and not fastened.

It yielded to a touch.

The horses were just placed in their stalls, the door bolted, and, reserving the task of attending to them to a future time, the three highwaymen hastened across the yard, impatient in the highest degree to have their hopes verified.

Throwing open the door, they strode into the kitchen.

Their appearance was greeted by a general cry, that seemed like one of dismay.

"Good gracious," said Tom Davis, starting up from his seat, "you have come back at last!"

Stifling a shriek, Maud tottered forward.

"You have brought him," she said—"you have brought him! The danger is past."

The highwaymen staggered back as if shot, and could only gasp out:

"Brought him?"

"Yes," said Maud, "do not fear the shock of his appearance; nothing could be worse than this suspense."

"But we have not brought him," cried Tom King, in a loud voice—"we have not brought him, because we had every reason to believe that he was here already!"

It was now the turn of those present to be amazed, and after this last speech of Tom's, a strange silence fell upon them all.

Maud grasped the corner of a table for support, and seemed by her manner as though upon the point of swooning.

"But this must be explained," said Tom Davis. "Be quick—let us know all about it!"

"But are you sure," cried Claude Duval, "that Dick has not come back—are you quite certain of it?"

"Yes, quite certain. What a strange question to ask! If he was here, don't you think he would hasten to make his appearance manifest?"

"Yes, yes—of course!" said Tom King. "But, before going into any long explanations, just understand this important fact: Dick Turpin has escaped from Newgate without any of our assistance, and, as we came to the conclusion, had succeeded in reaching here."

"Escaped?" cried Maud, with a shriek. "Do you mean he has escaped?"

"Yes, most certainly—we have conclusive evidence on that point."

She sank down with a sigh of relief, and began to weep.

Tom Davis was surprised beyond all measure, and he could only ask for a full account of what had happened.

This Tom set about giving as accurately as possible

When it was over, Tom Davis cried:

"Hurrah! It's all right! I don't feel afraid now—no, not a bit of it! If Dick has got out of Newgate, as it seems quite certain he has got out, he can be left to take care of himself wherever he may be! Yes—yes, it's all right! He's got out somehow or other, and is only waiting for the vigilance of the police to abate a little. Rest assured he will be here at the very earliest moment!"

"I hope so too," said Tom King, anxiously. "I can't take quite such a sanguine view of it as you do yet, if he is out of Newgate."

"But you told me you were sure of it."

"Well, so I am sure of it."

"Then," said Davis, again, "I tell you it's all right, and all you have got to do in the meantime is to wait here patiently, and trust to his making his appearance."

No one else present seemed inclined to look upon the matter in this hopeful light.

If, as had been suggested, Dick had managed to get somewhere just out of Newgate and no more, he might again fall into the hands of the officers, and then nothing could save him.

A gloomy silence followed, in which the ticking of the little Dutch clock became painfully audible.

Then Tom King, starting up, said:

"I don't know how you feel, comrades, but as for myself, I can only say I find it impossible to stop here a moment longer—I can't stay here inactive for the life of me! What do you say—will you accompany me back to London and endeavour to find out where the captain is?"

"Yes—yes!" cried his companions, eagerly. "We are ready now, and to the full as anxious as yourself."

"But—" began Tom Davis, in a tone of expostulation.

His words were suddenly interrupted by a terrific knocking at the front door—a knocking that seemed to cast quite a spell over everyone, leaving all immovable.

"Jack Marshall," gasped Tom Davis—"it's Jack Marshall, for a thousand pounds! We're caught at last! No, no—hide—hide, quickly, all of you! Be sure and get out of sight! Leave nothing behind you, and I will delay opening the door as long as I am able!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the knocking was renewed with redoubled vigour.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXII.

DESCRIBES THE EXTRAORDINARY INTERVIEW THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

THE Governor of Newgate was extremely surprised at receiving a communication from the King in so strange a fashion.

Since he had been called to his present office, such an event as a personal communication from royalty had never occurred, and he was in a state of flattering excitement accordingly.

Certainly documents with the King's signature had reached him many a time; but then they had always been forwarded through the medium of the Secretary of State.

This, however, was no doubt a veritable regal epistle, with the King's own autograph, and especially addressed to him.

Hastening to his own room, he unfastened the lock by means of a key on a small bunch that he always carried with him, and inside, as he expected, he found a letter bearing a large seal, on which was unmistakably impressed the royal arms of England.

In a straggling, foreign-looking hand the letter was superscribed:—

"TO THE GOVERNOR OF THE PRISON OF NEWGATE
[Private and confidential.]"



[THE HIGHWAYMEN AND TOM DAVIS ARE ALARMED AT THE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.]

For some moments Mr. Bradbury could not summon up courage enough to break the seal.

He felt ready to bow himself down and pay homage to this representative of the King.

Never before had he felt so strongly that peculiarity in his nature which always made him ready to worship anyone who stood higher in a worldly sense than himself.

At length the letter was opened, and to his unmitigated surprise he read the following words—not without some difficulty, however, for they had the appearance of having been hastily scrawled:—

"This is to certify that it is our royal pleasure that the Governor of our prison of Newgate shall at once set at large and release the prisoner he now has in custody, known by the name of Dick Turpin. And we still further command that his release be effected as privately and secretly as possible, so

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as to leave no clue behind; and as to the best means of doing this we leave entirely to the judgment of our faithful servant the Governor.

"GEORGE, REX."

Such was the letter, and after having perused it the Governor was in such a state of bewilderment that he could do nothing but sit helpless, while the King's letter seemed to dance before his eyes.

Recovering himself, he looked more closely at it.

Some doubt as to its genuineness had crossed his mind.

He scrutinised the signature attentively, and the result was that he felt perfectly convinced it was the King's own handwriting. He had seen it too often to make any mistake.

Yet, to satisfy any lingering doubt that he might have, he unlocked a small iron box, and took from it several

documents to which the King's signature was appended.

These were one by one compared, and the result was to strengthen his conviction that the document was genuine.

Having come to this conclusion, he restored the papers, and, leaning his head upon his hands, he tried first to think what motives had induced the King to take so unusual a proceeding, and, secondly, by what means he could spirit Dick Turpin out of Newgate.

In both of these attempts he failed most signally, and as a last resource he took up the lamp and his master-key, muttering the while:

"My course is clear. This letter will shield me. I will go to Turpin—he is a clever fellow, and will give me some information, beyond all doubt. I can understand now why he gave me his word not to escape, and why he has taken things so coolly and comfortably ever since he has been here."

With these reflections the Governor made his way towards Turpin's cell.

The two men were there on the watch, as usual.

The door was unfastened, and he entered in the manner described at the close of a preceding chapter.

When Dick, thus suddenly aroused, perceived the paper in the Governor's hands, he felt a sensation of relief come over him.

By instinct he seemed to know that the paper was the warrant for his liberation.

Accordingly, he sprang to his feet, and the door having been closed, the Governor said:

"Come here, and read this."

Dick advanced.

But his excitement was so great, and his eyes were so unaccustomed to the glare of the lamp, that he failed to make out a single word, although he tried his utmost.

"Thank you," he said, drawing back. "Would you oblige me by reading it? I cannot."

The Governor did oblige him, and Dick listened with sensations of the utmost pleasure.

At last he should be free.

All his anxieties and misgivings had passed away.

His comrade had succeeded, and the locket had proved its virtues.

"Now," said the Governor, sitting down upon a chair, "the authority of this paper is a thing that I cannot dispute, and of course I shall act in accordance with it; its production will shield me from all after consequences."

"There is no need to fear anything," said Dick; "but, at the same time, I should recommend you to preserve that letter faithfully."

The Governor smiled, for he had fully resolved never to part with it.

The position of Dick was now very much altered so far as the Governor was concerned—in fact, the latter was inclined to look up to him, as was his habit to almost everyone.

But the prominent idea in the Governor's mind was the very probable and reasonable one that Dick Turpin was the holder of some important State secret which, on the present occasion, had saved his life.

Wishing to understand as much of it as possible, Mr. Bradbury said:

"Now, Turpin, I have not found you to be altogether an unreasonable fellow, and I trust I have not gained your ill-will?"

"You certainly have not," said Dick. "I have got a few words to say upon that point."

"Well, reserve them for the present, and listen. I want you, if you will, to favour me with some account of the origin of this letter. How came the King to write it?"

"It is simple," said Dick. "Some time ago, a certain lady threw me in the way of a lady connected in some manner or other—I don't pretend to know how—with the royal family. To her I rendered a most important service, and, in return, she forced me to accept a small locket, the deliverance of which to the King, she assured me, would suffice to get me out of the greatest danger."

"Oh!" said the Governor, drawing a long breath, "that's it, is it?" And you found some means of delivering this locket?"

"Yes, I did. A comrade of mine took it, I believe, and

now you can understand why I gave you my word not to attempt to escape."

"I can understand it now very well," said the Governor, with another long breath; "and yet I question whether I should have placed so much faith upon the King's word as you have. I should have been full of doubts and fears."

Dick smiled.

"Not if you had lived in an atmosphere of danger so long as I have."

"Well, that may be," replied the Governor; "but what you have told me takes a great weight off my mind. And now, to consider the best means by which you can leave the prison unseen."

"Yes, that's important," said Dick; "and if the officers are watching so attentively as you stated, I don't know how it is to be done."

"I spoke the truth," said the Governor. "You can't imagine their vigilance."

"Wait a moment," said Dick. "We will, if you like, leave the discussion of that point for a little while longer. There is something I wish to say."

"What is it?"

"You spoke about my having no reasonable ground for complaint against you."

The Governor smiled.

"It is quite true," continued Dick, "and, in the event of things turning as they have, I had made up my mind just what I would do."

"Indeed!" said the Governor. "And what may that be?"

"Why, of course I might say a great many things expressive of my gratitude, and so forth, but then they would only be words, after all, leaving nothing substantial behind them. Now my desire is to give you some permanent mark of respect, if you will not mind accepting it."

"I want nothing," the Governor said, though the words were uttered in a tone that belied their import.

"Well," said Dick, "I am going to leave it to you in this way: I wish to make a substantial recognition, and this is how I propose it. Do you know Hampstead Heath?"

"I do—very well," answered the Governor, with a smile.

"Do you know the eastern end of it?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Do you happen to remember," pursued Dick, "seeing at the eastern extremity of the Heath an old tree that has been almost felled by time? The branches are all gone, and nothing but an old trunk remains, and that leans so far out of the perpendicular that it threatens to fall every moment."

"I cannot say I have observed it," replied the Governor, after a moment's consideration. "Surely I could have no difficulty in finding it."

"You will have no difficulty," said Turpin. "It is just in the position I describe, and so singular-looking a tree as that cannot be mistaken for another."

"Well," said the Governor, somewhat feverishly—"well?"

"It is well," said Turpin, with a smile, "for if, at any time you think proper, you will repair to that spot, and, going to the west side of the trunk of the tree, begin to dig close among the roots, you will find about eighteen inches from the surface the substantial recognition of which I spoke."

"But—but—" began the Governor, hesitatingly.

"You need have no scruples about appropriating it," returned Turpin—"in fact, I leave it entirely to you. If you like, you can go there and dig; and if not, I hope you will not be offended."

"By no means," said the Governor, before whose eyes there seemed to arise a most dazzling prospect—"by no means: not that I desire to have anything more than your thanks and the expression of your good will," he added, hypocritically.

"Well, then, you have them," said Turpin, "and you can have the other if you choose. And now, then, for a consideration of the other point."

"Your leaving Newgate secretly?"

"Yes—just so."

"Well, how is it to be done?"

"Can you think of no means?"

"No. I would rather leave it to you, and if you suggest anything reasonable I will consent to it."

"Wait a moment," said Dick.

Then, passing his hand over his forehead, he rapidly brought it down upon his thigh with an air of satisfaction.

"A good thought!" he said. "Yes, I have it—a good thought!"

"Well," said the Governor, anxiously, "out with it. Let me know what it is."

"Send the two men outside for a hackney-coach, and let it be brought round opposite the door leading from your own house. Then we will leave here together, and as soon as the coach arrives we will both pass through your front door, descend the steps, enter it together, and drive off. By that means the police officers will no doubt be thrown completely off their guard."

"Humph!" said the Governor, musingly. "Is there no other way?"

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN AND THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE HOLD A DEEPLY-INTERESTING CONFERENCE.

"NONE that I can think of," replied Dick. "But suppose you give the matter a few moments' consideration. You ought to be best able to judge what will be most successful."

The Governor rubbed his head with a puzzled air.

"I am sadly afraid——" he began.

"Of what?" interrupted Dick, anxiously.

"That your plan will never do."

"Indeed. Why not?"

"Simply because you have, as I might say, overlooked one very important fact—that of the prison being so closely surrounded by officers."

"Do you think they would notice us, then, if we left by your own private door?"

"Yes, I do; because when I said a short time ago that Newgate was so closely watched, and not a mouse could leave it unseen, I spoke literally. Depend upon it, the officers are so interested in what they are about that they will never for one moment remove their eyes—"

Dick rested his chin in between his hands.

"That does indeed make it difficult; and so, Mr. Bradbury, I shall be obliged to leave it to you, after all."

The Governor was seriously puzzled by the task that was set before him.

For the life of him he could not tell by what means Dick was to be spirited out of prison.

Time was passing, too, and the crowd outside in the Old Bailey was something terrific, and even the presence of all those people increased the difficulty of quitting the prison.

At length, Dick, after some moments' thought, raised his head, and fixed his eyes with a peculiar expression upon the Governor.

"Mr. Bradbury," he said, "I fancy, after all, there is but one way."

"One way?" echoed the Governor, almost mechanically.

"Yes. As it is impossible for me to leave Newgate unseen, I must remain where I am."

The Governor stared at the prisoner for some moments in the most undisguised astonishment, and then he gasped rather than said:

"Remain where you are? Why—why——"

Dick only smiled at the puzzled expression of his countenance.

"I must make my meaning a little clearer," he said.

"Yes, do so, pray, for may I be hanged if I can understand you now at all!"

"Listen, then," said Dick. "I suppose when it is known I have escaped——"

The Governor interrupted him.

"You are beginning at the wrong end, my friend. It will be time enough to consider what will be done after your escape, when you have decided as to how you are to obtain your freedom."

"No, no," said Dick—"excuse me. Just allow me to finish."

"Very well. Go on, then."

"I say, after I have escaped, I suppose the vigilance of the police officers will materially abate, for there will then be no necessity for them to keep up their strict, observant watch."

"No—no, certainly not," said the Governor; "but what has that to do with it?"

"Everything," said Dick, "for, in half a dozen words, what I propose is that you should conceal me somewhere in the prison for the space of twenty-four hours or so; then, when it is given out and believed that I have escaped, and the officers, as you say, have relaxed their vigilance—then will be the time for me to slip off quietly."

"Good!" said Mr. Bradbury, clapping his hands together, with his eyes sparkling brightly—"good! You have hit the nail right on the head this time and no mistake! I wonder how it was we did not think of that before!"

"It is not yet too late," said Dick. "Am I to understand that you approve of this suggestion?"

"Yes—most decidedly I approve of it, for what better one could be made?"

Dick was silent, and then the Governor continued, almost immediately:

"There are a few obstacles in the way of carrying out this design."

Dick nodded, as he replied:

"I am quite aware of that; but still there is no doubt they can be overcome."

"Very likely," said the Governor; "and to begin with the first and greatest, we have the two men outside."

"Just so."

"Now, how are they to be managed? You cannot leave this cell without being seen by them; and so the question arises: shall we take them into our confidence?"

"Not by any means," said Dick; "and, if you will excuse me, I would suggest that we speak in rather a lower tone of voice."

"A good caution. But now, Turpin, if we don't take these men into our confidence, how shall you manage to get out of the cell?"

"We must consider," said Turpin. "There is time yet, and it seems to me you are the proper person to decide upon the best means of dealing with them."

"It has been many and many a day," exclaimed the Governor, "since I puzzled my brains to such an extent! If you'd give me the world I don't know how this is to be managed!"

"Stay a little," said Dick. "Could you not manage to send one of them to fetch something for you?"

"Yes—certainly," answered the Governor, abstractedly. "One could go; but how about the other?"

"Why, suppose, after a time, you send him too?"

"I comprehend you," cried the Governor, with a readiness of apprehension that rather surprised Dick—"I comprehend you, and, as there is no time to be lost, I will commence at once."

Dick did not venture to say no, for he was anxious to quit the cell in which he had passed so many lonely hours, though, had he followed his own inclinations, he would first of all have planned his proceedings from the beginning to the end.

The Governor, however, rose briskly to his feet, and, going to the door, tapped upon it with his knuckles.

The man outside understood the signal, and immediately opened it.

"Miller!" he cried.

"Yes, sir."

"You know my room—my office, I mean, where the papers are kept?"

"Yes, sir, I know it."

"Well, then, I want you to go there," continued the Governor, "and just inside the little drawer in the table, and lying quite on the top of the other papers, you will see a letter in a large envelope. Go and bring it to me."

"I will, sir."

"You are sure you understand? Don't fail to bring the right one."

Miller shuffled off, and the Governor closed the door again.

"There's one gone," he said, in a whisper, to Dick,

"though we must be quick, for he will soon return."

"And the other?" Turpin exclaimed—"how about the other?"

"I will show you," said Mr. Bradbury. "But just wait a moment. I am not afraid that Miller will return just yet, for one thing, the distance is considerable, and for another, in the drawer to which I have sent him is a large flat bottle of hollanda, and if he does not pay his respects to that before he returns, I am not Governor of Newgate."

Dick laughed, and then there was a pause of about half a minute's duration.

At the end of that time the Governor again went to the door and tapped at it as he had done on the previous occasion.

The other man opened it.

"Oh, I am very sorry," said the Governor, "but you heard what I said to Miller a moment ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, I find I have just made a mistake. The letter I spoke of is not in the drawer, but under the inkstand in the centre of the table. He will perhaps turn all my papers topsy-turvy. Just run and tell him what I say. I can guard the prisoner in the meantime."

The man nodded, and made off at once, for in Newgate Mr. Bradbury reigned supreme, and not one of his subordinates ever dreamed of such an outrageous thing as questioning any command that might be issued.

"Now is your time, Dick," said the Governor, turning round, hastily. "The coast is clear, and will be for at least another moment."

"Capital!" said Dick. "Upon my word, you deserve much for your ingenuity! You have managed this cleverly indeed. What a pity you were not a diplomatist."

The Governor smiled, and felt pleased at the compliment.

"I flatter myself," he said, "that I should have succeeded in that line very well. But be quick—there's no knowing how soon those fellows may take it into their heads to return."

"But where shall I go?" said Dick, who, in spite of his self-command, felt his heart beating at a more than usual rate.

"When you get into the passage," whispered the Governor, hurriedly, "turn to the right, and hasten forward for a short distance. On both sides of you you will see doors similar to this sunk deeply in the wall. Conceal yourself in one of them. The passage is dark, and as the turnkeys will never think of looking for you you will be unseen."

"And then," said Dick, "what next?"

"Wait there until you see me pass along the passage, then step forth, and, as noiselessly as you can, follow in my footsteps."

"Good!" said Dick. "I trust all to you, and depend upon it this will not be the worst night's work that you have ever done."

With these words on his lips Dick slipped through the door of his cell, and as he did so he drew a long breath, and felt quite a joyous feeling come over him.

It seemed to him that he was already free.

Following the injunctions of the Governor, he turned to the right, and hastened for some distance along the corridor.

As he had been told, it was very dark, for although oil lamps were burning dimly here and there, yet the warders did not trust so much to them as to the lanterns they always carried with them, and which served to dissipate the darkness.

The doors, too, were sunk very deeply into the wall, and, as a matter of course, these recesses were in very dark shade indeed, and Dick felt that he could scarcely hope for a better hiding-place.

All at once, he heard a footstep, and then, immediately afterwards, perceived at some distance the flashing of a light.

Murmuring voices reached his ears, and although he had not gone so far along the corridor as he could have wished, yet he felt that his wisest course would be to conceal himself at once, and therefore slipping into one of the dark recesses we have described, he squeezed himself as closely as he could into the corner formed by the

door and the wall, and remained there a prey to considerable anxiety, and listening to the voices and footsteps of the men who were approaching.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIMSELF COMFORTABLE IN THE PRIVATE APARTMENTS OF THE GOVERNOR.

DICK could not help reflecting how strange it was that he should feel so deep an interest in every movement made and word spoken by these two men, and yet such was the case, and he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to make out what they were saying to each other.

He gathered first, from the tones of their voices, that some dispute was going on between them.

Directly afterwards he distinguished the words:

"I tell you you are a fool, Dick Miller, and I don't go behind your back to say it!"

"Oh, bother!"

"Well, we shall see," returned the other turnkey. "Don't you think the Governor knows all about that bottle of hollanda in his drawer?—don't you even think that he could have missed the smallest drop of it?"

"Oh, bother!" said Miller again.

"And yet when I came into the room," continued the other, "these you must be swigging at it, and not content with that, must be so frightened at hearing some one come in that you dropped it."

"Well, it was your fault!" growled Miller. "What the deuce did you want to come sneaking into the room like that for? Who expected you, I should like to know, scaring a fellow out of his blessed wits?"

"I didn't come sneaking in—I walked in because Mr. Bradbury sent me. What excuse shall you make about the hollanda?—that's what I want to know."

"Well, how does it concern you?"

"Why, I know you of old. You would not scruple to put it on to my shoulders if you could!"

Dick Miller laughed.

"Well, stow it now," he said; "we can finish the subject another time. Do you want him to overhear us?"

"No—not I. But what will he say when we tell him that we can't find the letter he sent us for?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Dick Miller, with an air of satisfaction, "I am glad to say you are as deeply in for that as I am—he can't blame one without blaming both."

"Well," said the other turnkey, "he told me it was under the inkstand, and I'll take my oath any minute it wa'n't—so there's an end."

By this time the two men got out of hearing.

Upon reaching the door of the cell so lately occupied by Dick Turpin, they tapped upon it with their knuckles.

The Governor opened it to the extent of about a couple of inches.

"Well," he said, "the letter?"

"If you please, sir," returned Miller, humbly, "we're looked everywhere, and can't find it."

"Can't find it? Was it not under the inkstand?"

"No, sir."

"Well, where can it have got to? However, never mind."

Then, turning round, as if Dick was still in the cell, and as if he was about to address him, the Governor said:

"I will go myself, Turpin, and fetch the warrant, since you profess to be so particular about it; or, if you don't mind waiting, you shall see it the first thing in the morning."

With these words, the Governor stepped nimbly out of the cell, drawing the door after him.

"Now, Miller," he said, "put the bar up, and fasten the door securely. Mind, you are responsible for your prisoner, and if he gets out between now and morning you will be punished severely."

"All right, sir!" said the turnkey. "You never knew Dick Miller make a failure of that kind yet. Now," he continued, as he finished putting up the fastenings, "get out of that, Mr. Dick, if you can."

Never for one moment did the idea occur to the turnkeys that Dick had been already liberated from his cell; indeed, it was not likely that so unreasonable a notion should enter their minds; therefore, drawing up the two three-legged stools with which they had provided there

selves, they sat down with their backs to the door, prepared to wait patiently till morning.

The Governor walked along the passage with a heavy tread, the echoes of his footsteps reverberating through the long, silent corridors.

Dick observed his coming, and as soon as the Governor passed his hiding-place, he stepped out on tiptoe.

Then, guessing why the Governor was treading with such unusual heaviness, Dick cleverly and quickly fell into step with him, keeping such exact time, and allowing his feet to fall so lightly, that it would have required a very sharp ear to distinguish that two persons were walking along the stone corridor instead of one.

At every step they took the necessity for this caution abated, yet they did not venture to change their positions.

To what part of the prison the Governor was now about to conduct him, Dick Turpin scarcely knew, but contented himself with thinking that it would be to some place where, at any rate, they could sit down and hold a further consultation as to his future proceedings.

In this he was not mistaken.

Pursuing certain passages rarely used by anyone except himself, and which led directly to his own private apartments, the Governor hurried forward, nor did he pause until the room was reached in which he sat down to transact his business.

Dick Turpin entered closely after him, and, in obedience with a sign from the Governor, closed the door and slipped a little bolt into its socket.

Then the first thing that met their gaze was the fragments of the broken bottle of hollands, which were strewn in all directions about the carpet, while the room was filled with the overpowering odour of that spirit.

Instead of manifesting any anger at making this discovery, as one might have expected, the Governor placed his hands slowly together, and began to rub them one over the other with an air of great apparent satisfaction.

"Capital," he said—"capital! Nothing could be better!"

"Indeed!" said Dick. "May I ask to what you refer?"

"Why, this," he replied, pointing to the broken glass upon the floor. "I told you they would not fail to pay their respects to this bottle of spirits, and by some accident or other, you see, they have broken it. They will now be frightened to death, lest I should expose what they have done, and cause them to be punished. They are now quite in my power, which, just at the present time, is quite a fortunate circumstance."

Again the Governor rubbed his hands, and Dick, leaving him to indulge in his felicitations, drew a chair close up to the fire and sat down.

He spread out his fingers to the blaze, for his cell was damp and chilly, and the sight of a little fire was now quite a pleasant thing.

Outside in the street the roaring and howling of the people could be heard with painful distinctness.

It was a sound that Dick hated to listen to, and yet he could not close his ears to it.

Little, however, did he think that his comrades formed a parcel of the disorderly route outside, nor did he guess how anxiously their eyes were fixed upon that portion of the prison occupied by the Governor.

"Now," said Mr. Bradbury at length, turning to the fire, "having accomplished our purpose so far, and having succeeded so well, let us have a little further consideration."

"With all my heart."

"Well, then, it seems to me the chief thing is to decide where you are to remain concealed until night-fall."

Dick nodded.

"Well, continued the Governor, "I must confess that is a matter that puzzles me. I should be glad to place one of my private rooms at your disposal, but," he concluded, with a sigh and a shake of his head, "that is impossible—quite impossible."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "I am very sorry to hear that."

"It is no fault of mine," continued Mr. Bradbury—"none at all, I assure you. It is Mrs. B.—a most inquisitive woman she is, I can assure you; and as for

trusting her with a secret— But there, that will do—least said soonest mended."

Dick laughed as he said:

"I don't want to cause you any trouble, Mr. Bradbury. I am much obliged to you for all you have done; but is there no cell into which you could slip me and keep me safe till the appointed time?"

Mr. Bradbury again shook his head.

"We are so uncommonly full," he said—"I scarcely ever knew such a thing, and, besides, you might be liable to discovery in a moment."

"Then what on earth is to be done?"

"That's just what I want to know, and I should be glad if you would think the matter over."

Dick continued to warm himself by the fire, and for several moments there was a profound silence, which was broken at length by the Governor, who asked:

"Well, Dick, have you yet thought of anything?"

"Nothing particular," was the answer. "To be sure there's one idea; but then—"

"Let us hear it, said the Governor—"let us hear it, by all means!"

"Well, then," began Dick, "although you have been Governor of this prison for so short a period, yet you must be aware that the present building is quite a modern structure."

"Yes," said the Governor—"that's true enough."

"Quite true," replied Dick. "Newgate was first built many hundreds of years ago, and from time to time the place has been pulled down, and rebuilt and altered."

"Well, what of all this?" said the Governor, growing interested, though he could not see what it had to do with finding a hiding-place for his prisoner.

"Simply this," was Dick's answer. "In the course of this pulling down, and rebuilding, and alteration, some portions of the ancient edifice have been left, and, to cut short my remarks, I have been told that underneath this present prison of Newgate there exists what one may term another prison, being the remains of the dungeons formerly constructed there."

"Yes," answered Mr. Bradbury. "I have heard something of the kind myself, though I never paid much attention to it. Still, even supposing such places as you mention to exist, they have not been opened for centuries at least, and it is very improbable that any communication exists between the old prison and the new."

"Yet such might be the case," said Dick—"indeed, I have heard it confidently asserted. Now you understand the drift of my remarks. If we can find out this communication, surely, if I conceal myself in underground Newgate, I shall never be discovered, not even if my presence in the building was guessed at, and a close search made."

The Governor shivered, and half unconsciously drew closer to the fire.

"But just consider," he said, "what an uncomfortable place to be in. Fancy the idea of remaining in vaults or dungeons that have been closed up so long—alone, too! Should you not feel afraid?"

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXV.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE DISCOVERS THAT HE HAS MADE A TREMENDOUS BLUNDER.

AT these words, Dick Turpin's lips curled with a contemptuous smile.

"Afraid," he said—"I afraid? No, fear and Dick Turpin have never been acquainted yet, and they will always continue strangers—least of all should I be afraid of darkness."

"It is not the darkness," said the Governor, "but the associations. However, not to go into the subject any further, just tell me by what means you hope to discover a way of communication, supposing any to exist."

"Oh," said Dick, "that's just the point."

"I wish I could give you some information upon it, but I can't."

"Neither can I," continued Turpin, whose eyes had during the last few moments been resting upon a range of shelves. "Do you not think it possible that some of those volumes might give us the information we seek?"

"They might," said the Governor; "they are the annals of Newgate, though, to tell the truth, ever since I

have been here I have had enough to do in keeping the records without looking back to the past."

"I suppose so," said Turpin, rising and going towards the books, in which, as may be imagined, he felt more than a common interest.

The Governor placed himself by his side, and, with a brush that he had picked up, removed a portion of the dust covering the books, so that the lettering could be seen.

"I am no book scholar," said Turpin. "Suppose you reach down one or two of them and glance over the pages; you may find something."

The Governor evidently thought the suggestion a good one, for he at once took down one of the dusty volumes and turned over its mouldering pages.

"If," said Dick, "you could only find a plan or map of some kind, that would be all we should require; but stay—what's that?"

Even as he spoke, the Governor paused in turning over the book, for in between two of the leaves a folded sheet of paper had been placed.

This he at once spread open, and he had to be particularly careful in the process.

The paper was so old, and so decayed by age, that it almost fell to pieces beneath his touch.

Upon it could be traced several indistinct lines, and in the lower right-hand corner in large letters was the word "Newgate."

"This must be the very thing," said Dick, bending forward eagerly.

The Governor bent down too, and managed to decipher the words:

"Plan of ye Prison of Newgate. Anno 1611."

"That's the thing," said Dick, as the Governor read these words aloud. "I think we are all right now."

Long and anxiously did that strange pair bend over the mouldering old map and follow out with their fingers the various lines upon it.

It was necessary that the examination should be a careful one, and it was some time indeed before they could exactly make out the bearings of it.

At last, having succeeded, the Governor said:

"Here, if anywhere, are the means of communication. Whether such may exist to this day is very doubtful, and yet I have a recollection of seeing an old door at the extremity of one of the underground passages, the cells leading out of which," he added, "have for a long time been disused in consequence of the damp."

"Then I have good hopes of it," said Turpin. "At any rate, we will go there and look."

"Agreed," said the Governor, folding up the map and restoring it to its place. "What a fortunate discovery!" he added, as he turned back.

"Most fortunate! And now, to set the point at rest."

"In a moment," said the Governor—"in a moment; but I feel fatigued, and exhausted, and chilly, this evening. Suppose we have one glass together; I should be better prepared to start then."

"As you will," said Dick, carelessly. "I hold you responsible for my safety. You know what the King has written, and he will look to you to carry out his commands."

"Yes," said the Governor, "there's no doubt about that. I will hide you somewhere, rest assured, and between now and morning there is time enough and to spare."

"Very true," said Dick; "and I would rather be seated here in your pleasant company than down below by myself."

The Governor went to a little cupboard, and produced a couple of glasses and a bottle.

A small kettle was simmering by the side of the fire, and with the water he made two glasses very hot and very strong.

Surely, of all the strange positions in which Dick had been placed, this was strangest of all.

Who in the whole world would credit that a notorious highwayman like himself, whose capture had been a source of so much trouble, should be seated quietly by the fireside drinking a glass with the Governor of Newgate?

Yet there he was, and could any of his comrades but have had a glance at him, they would have seen that he looked very comfortable indeed.

It was after a pause that had begun to grow irksome, that Dick said:

"Since we are to sit here a few moments together, Mr. Bradbury, there's a little subject I should like to talk over with you."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"Well, one that turns out to be of no importance now; but would you mind favouring me with a sight of the warrant that has been re-indorsed for my execution?"

"How strange!" thought the Governor, for just then he remembered the words he had made use of when leaving the cell.

Then aloud he added

"I am happy to oblige you in such a simple way as that. Here it is."

He rose from his seat as he spoke, and placed a parchment in Turpin's hand.

"There," he added, pointing to some writing on the outside of it, "you see the secretary has just signed his name, and put the date."

"Yes, I see," said Dick; "but I am not quite satisfied."

"Indeed! In what way can I satisfy you?"

"I don't understand these documents myself," Dick answered. "Suppose you open it, and begin to read it."

"It'll take some time," said the Governor; "but, however, I can't refuse you."

Accordingly, he opened the warrant, and went through the preamble at the head of it; then uttered a shout of surprise.

Dick gazed at him quietly, and from his manner it was evident he expected some such manifestation from the Governor.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, seeing that the Governor looked more and more amazed.

Mr. Bradbury did not reply, but looked at the warrant again, as though in doubt whether his eyes had served him aright.

Then, with a look of consternation, and almost of horror, on his countenance, he dropped the paper, and stared at Dick, who simply said:

"Well?"

"Well?" exclaimed the Governor. "It is not at all well. But let me look again—I cannot even now believe it!"

He glanced again at the warrant, and then said:

"No, there can be no mistake—this is not the warrant for your execution."

Dick nodded as if he felt quite certain this was a fact.

"Indeed," continued the Governor, "it is a warrant for a companion of yours—to wit, Tom King."

"I don't doubt it," said Turpin; "but I am just a little curious to know by what means you could make that warrant serve for me. You told me I had been tried and sentence passed upon me, which was true, though not at Newgate."

"Ah!" cried the Governor, drawing a breath of relief; "you have been tried then?"

"Yes, certainly, but it was only for a boyish freak. I was taken up on a charge of deer stealing, and brought before a magistrate named Sir Thomas Deane, who found me guilty and pronounced sentence. But what has that to do with the present matter?"

"Nothing at all," said the Governor. "The blunder is mine—a most awful blunder, I must say, yet how it has remained undetected passes my comprehension."

"It is by no means clear to me," said Turpin, "though I could give a guess. But explain it."

"I will," said the Governor. "Candidly, then, I must tell you that the impression was quite strong and fixed in my mind that you had been confined in Newgate—"

"So I have," interrupted Dick.

"Tried and condemned."

"Which I have not," he interrupted, again.

"Well, I fully believed so, and I thought you only escaped when Newgate was attacked by the mob. That was during the time when Mr. Cawthorn was Governor."

Dick nodded.

"I was in Newgate then," he said, "but I was awaiting trial—not condemned. Tom King was here too, and the warrant was all in readiness for his execution, but, luc fly, he escaped."

"That where the mistake is," said the Governor. "I

went to these papers under the impression I have just named, and, coming to this warrant, did not trouble myself to glance at it particularly, for, as you see, it runs thus: 'Of Tom King, the accomplice of Dick Turpin and others.' You see, there's your name on it," he continued, pointing it out to Dick, "and so, with this impression on my mind, I folded it up and sent it off, believing it was veritably the warrant for your execution."

"But would not such a mistake be discovered?"

"I should have thought so," said the Governor. "It is pretty clear the Secretary of State looked at it no more attentively than I did; the probability is, he just endorsed it, as you see, without ever unfolding it; or, if he was aware of the mistake, as he may be, his idea might have been that it would be best found out afterwards."

Dick drew a long breath.

"I wish I had understood this fully before," he said.

"It would have altered my course of action; and yet, upon second thoughts, perhaps things are best as they are."

"Yes, rely upon it," said the Governor, who, every time he looked at the warrant, felt a pang of alarm.

"But just for curiosity's sake," exclaimed Dick, "tell me what would have been the effect of the discovery of this mistake in the warrant, supposing it had been made before my execution?"

"Why, it could not have taken place, that's all," said the Governor—"at least, not by the time appointed. You would have been seized, imprisoned again, and properly tried. Of course a verdict of guilty would have been found, and your position would be just the same as before."

Dick suddenly became lost in thought.

Rousing himself at length, he cried:

"Say no more about it, Mr. Bradbury. Depend upon it, I will not mention the subject, for fear that it should bring you into any trouble, and for the present you know I am safe—in fact, I always shall be, for no matter what the odds may be, I will never yield myself a prisoner again—I have had enough of it."

The Governor pushed the warrant out of the way, and drained his glass.

"I am afraid," he said, "though I thank you all the same, that this matter will creep out; some people must recollect all about it, and then there will be a regular row."

"Don't fear," said Dick, "for through me you have gained a powerful friend."

This remembrance appeased the Governor greatly.

Dick emptied his glass also, and then said:

"Come, Mr. Bradbury, we have sat here long enough; it is getting fast towards morning now, and if the communication with old Newgate is to be discovered, now is the time. Lead the way—I shall be glad to be relieved of my present state of suspense."

"No doubt," said the Governor, rather gloomily. "I wish from the very bottom of my heart that the day was over, and night come."

"And I wish," Dick added, "that I was safe out of Newgate, and a mile away from it at the least."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN GAINING ADMISSION TO A PORTION OF OLD NEWGATE.

"No doubt," said the Governor, smiling at the heartiness with which Dick Turpin spoke—"no doubt, but some time will have to elapse before that desirable state of things can possibly come to pass."

He took up the lamp as he spoke, and stepped towards the door.

"Excuse me for making myself so much at home," said Dick; "but if you have no objection I will appropriate this bottle of brandy to my own use; it strikes me that it will prove no bad companion to me when down there in the vaults."

"Take it—take it, by all means," said the Governor; "you will indeed want something to keep the damp out."

"And a light," said Turpin—"I must have a light of some description; not that I care so much about remaining in the dark, only if I have a lamp burning I shall know at once by the appearance of the flame whether the air I breathe is pure enough to support life."

The Governor nodded.

"A prudent thought," he said. "You must not be without a lamp, otherwise you might stray into some passage or other where the air is vitiated from having been closed up so long; no doubt the whole place is filled with a foul atmosphere."

"Then, if you like," said Dick, "I will take the lamp you have in your hand."

"Very good."

"But shall you not want some light in order to return?"

"No," replied the Governor, with a smile. "Short as has been my residence in Newgate, I have already learned every turn and corner in it. I can find my way back in the dark easily; and there will be this advantage attached to it, I shall be more likely to escape observation."

Dick nodded as he answered:

"Lead on, then, now—I am quite ready."

The Governor obeyed, and the next moment this strangely-assorted couple were traversing the long, silent corridors of Newgate.

Very still, very gloomy, and very oppressive were they, and a by no means comfortable sensation came over Dick, but he banished it as well as he could, and, in obedience to the injunctions of his companion, trod as lightly as was possible.

More like two ghosts, then, than two living human beings, they continued gliding along passages, which seemed interminable, especially to Dick, who was top-full of impatience.

Fearing to raise an alarm, scarcely a word had been exchanged between them since they started, but all at once the Governor, pausing slightly, said, in a whisper:

"Now, then, we shall soon know whether the entrance to old Newgate exists, for at the bottom of this flight of steps is the corridor of which I spoke."

Dick made no reply, but raised his finger and pointed down the slippery staircase at the top of which they stood.

Mr. Bradbury understood him, and commenced the descent.

Ever since they had quitted the Governor's apartments they had been gradually descending.

Each passage that they traversed was on a lower level than the one preceding it.

Never until now, however, had they reached a staircase so deep and well-like as this one.

The air, too, was bitter cold, and laden with an unwholesome moisture.

"There is not much fear of an interruption now," the Governor said, speaking as well as his chattering teeth would allow him; "this part of the prison is never visited, I believe, and you may almost make yourself safe here—the cells are all out of repair, and quite unfit for use."

Just as he finished speaking, the bottom of the staircase was reached, and then they found themselves standing in an arched passage, so narrow, that by standing in the centre of it, and stretching out the arms horizontally the sides could be touched, and so low that Dick's hat brushed away many of the dark fungi that depended from the ceiling.

The walls, too, in many places were covered with nitric exhalations, which had crystallised, and so sparkled brilliantly as the rays of the lamp fell upon them.

But there was a general clamminess in the air, and an unwholesome odour that irresistibly reminded them of the grave.

Mr. Bradbury seemed by no means anxious to linger in this passage.

He quickened his pace considerably, and then, having reached the extremity of the passage, paused.

Deeply set in the crumbling wall was a small door, apparently of great strength.

It was secured by means of massive iron bars, a huge lock, and a bolt of corresponding proportions at the top and bottom.

"There," said the Governor, with a shiver, "that's the door, and beyond all doubt there lies beyond it all that remains of old Newgate."

It was impossible for Dick to look upon the old doorway without a feeling of deep, strange interest.

"Will you hold the lamp," said the Governor, "while I try to remove the bars and bolts?"

"Nay," said Dick, placing the bottle on the gro-

"allow me to do that, for I fancy I am stronger than you are. But how about the lock—how shall we undo that?"

"I know not," said the Governor. "The chances are a thousand to one whether the key belonging to it is in existence. To me, the door itself looks very old and rotten, and if the bars are taken down and the bolts withdrawn, we may be able to force it open."

Dick thought so too, and then, not without much trouble, and difficulty, and delay, managed to remove the fastenings spoken of.

The bolts gave him the greatest trouble, for it seemed as though they had completely rusted into their sockets.

"Now," said the Governor, when the last bolt was withdrawn, "try if the door will open."

Dick pressed against it, and it gave way slightly.

"I think we shall manage it," he said. "Either the lock has rusted away or else the place into which the bolts fit has rotted."

He again renewed the pressure, though the Governor exclaimed:

"No violence, mind—no violence! This place, for all I know, may be visited to-morrow, and your destruction, or, at least, your discovery is certain if there are any appearances of this door having been forced."

"All right," said Dick. "There you are."

Just as he spoke the door creaked open a little way upon its hinges.

The lock had been forced, but it was the doorpost that had given way, and on the side where they now stood no traces of violence could be perceived.

No sooner was the door opened than a quantity of foul air rushed forth.

So powerful was it that both Dick and the Governor felt giddy and sick, and the light they carried was well-nigh extinguished.

But, mingling with the purer atmosphere in the damp passage, the foul air quickly lost its noxious qualities.

"That's not encouraging," said Dick, as soon as he was able to speak. "However, we will push the door wide open, so as to ventilate the place a little bit."

This he did, and remained for some time in order that the desired effect might be produced.

Then, warned by the flight of time, he picked up the bottle of brandy from the floor, and took the lamp from the hands of the Governor.

"Good-bye for the present," he said—"good-bye! Make the door secure after me, and when it is time for me to escape, come here again."

"You may depend upon that," said the Governor. "And, if a long time elapses, do not be either alarmed or uneasy, for circumstances may keep me away."

"You may depend upon that. I shall keep perfectly quiet until you return. I have no wish to be discovered."

"That is sufficient, then. Good-bye!"

Dick, with the lamp in his hand, crossed the gloomy threshold, and stood in a passage leading he knew not whither.

The Governor closed the door, and, in spite of the darkness, succeeded in replacing the whole of the fastenings, and so successfully that it was very doubtful that the fact of the door having been opened would be discovered.

Although in Newgate, and in that damp, cold passage, Dick Turpin had felt while the Governor was with him that he was an inmate of this world and that there was life around him; but as soon as the old door was closed this impression vanished, and was succeeded by a totally different one.

It seemed as though in crossing that threshold he had stepped from life to death.

The silence around was something terrible; even one retreating footstep of the Governor could not be distinguished, and the darkness was so dense that it defied altogether the illuminating powers of the lamp, which seemed to shine only like a star from a dark cloud.

With a view of getting the better of these feelings, Dick applied himself to the bottle of brandy, and having drunk a small portion of the spirit, felt considerably relieved—he looked about him, indeed, with quite a different feeling, and he either imagined, or it was a reality, that the lamp now burned more clearly than before, and enabled him to see around him.

So far as he could tell, the passage in which he stood did not differ particularly from the one he had just left; yet he felt a strange sensation creep over him, as he reflected that probably he was the only human being who had stood there for more than a hundred years.

And now, as he remained quite still, listening, a faint sound that was before inaudible came upon his ears.

It was the dull drip, drip of water trickling down somewhere in the distance.

In such a place as that Dick felt that it would be some relief and consolation to hear even his own voice, and so, in default of having anyone to speak to, he uttered his thoughts aloud.

"I can't remain here all the time," he said—"I should be chilled through to the very bone. No, I will take advantage of this opportunity to explore the hidden mysteries of old Newgate. No doubt I shall find much to interest me and repay me for my trouble. But I must be careful in my wanderings. What means can I adopt to find my way back to this door with certainty?"

This was a question that required a good deal of deliberation.

Many means suggested themselves to him, only, unfortunately, he had not the necessary tools to carry them into effect.

A simple plan would have been to make chalk marks upon the floor, but even this was impossible, for he had no chalk.

Soon afterwards, however, it occurred to him that he might manage to pick out a piece of crumbling mortar from the wall, and make that answer his purpose; at any rate, he resolved to try.

He succeeded in obtaining a piece of mortar from between two of the stones, and, upon trying whether it would leave a mark behind it, was delighted to find that it answered the purpose almost as well as chalk itself, for, being soft with damp, it crumbled easily.

Feeling now great confidence in being able to find his way back, and having refreshed himself with another draught of brandy, Dick took up the lamp, and walked slowly and carefully along the passage, looking keenly at each side of him.

Having gone about twenty paces, he paused, and, stooping down, drew upon the flooring a rude representation of an arrow with the point turned in the direction of the door.

By the aid of this he could not possibly fail to find his way back, nor could he be in any doubt as to which way he should turn; and this precaution he resolved to adopt at every twenty paces or thereabouts.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVII.

IN WHICH THE TWO SHERIFFS LOSE THEIR APPETITE FOR BREAKFAST.

It was in no very enviable frame of mind that the Governor of Newgate groped his way back through the dark passages to his own apartments.

However much confidence he might place in the King's letter, yet he knew there could not fail to be a tremendous row when Turpin's absence was discovered, and the consequences might be very disagreeable to himself, though he was sustained by the thought that in the end all would be well.

His mind was troubled, too, respecting the egregious blunder he had made with regard to the warrant.

He was afraid that mistake would somehow or other become known, or the sheriffs might take it into their heads to look at the document, and then a discovery would be certain.

This would bring up a fresh charge against him, for he would have to clear himself from his very culpable negligence.

When, therefore, he ascended to his bedroom to snatch an hour or so's sleep before the business of the day began, he was in no humour to listen to the railings of his wife; and in a short time such a storm of words arose that the Governor was obliged to retreat vanquished from the room—sleep there was quite out of the question.

Descending to his office, he sat there watching the daylight as it gradually stole into the room.



[THE ATTACK OF THE POLICE OFFICERS UPON THE THREE SPIDERS INN.]

He went once to the blind, and drew it slightly aside to peep out.

He drew back immediately, somewhat dismayed by the immense concourse without.

"They will be enraged beyond all measure," he muttered, "when they learn their disappointment. However, the walls of Newgate are strong, and while I am within them I shall be safe."

Breakfast was brought, but Mr. Bradbury was too excited to partake of anything.

He solaced himself with one more perusal of the King's letter, which he carefully consigned to an inner pocket of his coat.

It was shortly afterwards the intelligence was brought to him that the sheriffs had arrived.

It was his duty to receive them, and usher them into the prison, so he went forth accordingly.

No. 182.—BLACK BESS.

Never before had the Governor appeared so full of urbanity.

He bowed so continually and so deeply, that it seemed as if he was unable to straighten his back.

"Very good—very good!" said one of the sheriffs, in a wheezy voice, and who, had he not rejoiced in the suggestive name of Moses Moses, would have been known by the cast of his countenance to be a descendant of Abraham.

His companion was a Mr. Lupin, a silk mercer in the City, whose premises having once been broken into and robbed, had caused him ever afterwards to be an implacable foe to robbers of all kinds, and nothing in the world afforded him so much genuine satisfaction as to see one of the race disposed of at Tyburn.

"Breakfast is ready, I suppose, Bradbury," said Mr. Lupin. "We will sit down to breakfast, and then we

shall be fortified against the heavy duties of this day. The prisoner is all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!" said the Governor, licking his lips, and howling again so as to conceal his countenance as much as possible. "I have been most particular in my charge of him, and paid him a visit in his cell at midnight, and left him there quite safe."

"And were two men outside the door?"

"Yes," responded the Governor, "they have kept careful watch ever since."

"That's all right, then."

"Mr. Lupin," said Mr. Moses, "it strikes me it would be no very bad thing if we were to pay a visit to the cell the first thing—just a preliminary visit, you know."

"Good—so we will!" responded his companion. "I am sure the sight of the rascal will impart an extra relish to every mouthful I eat!"

The Governor began to tremble.

The moment of discovery had come.

"I'll warrant," said Moses Moses, "that, with all his bravado, this Turpin will not have so good an appetite for his breakfast as we shall—eh, Lupin?"

"No—no, decidedly not," responded that individual, passing his arm through that of his fellow-sheriff.

Mr. Bradbury, with a dreadful quaking at the heart, led the sheriffs to the vestibule of the prison.

Here they found the turnkey who had behaved in so friendly a manner to Dick, with a huge tray of eatables in his hands.

"Eh—eh?" said Moses Moses. "Who's that for?"

"What is it—what is it?" inquired the Governor, addressing the turnkey.

"The prisoner's breakfast, if you please, sir," he answered, respectfully. "I was just going to take it in."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Lupin. "The idea of a prisoner having such a breakfast as that! It's time this state of things was altered. Why, the rascals positively live in Newgate like kings—yes, like kings."

"You can follow us, then," said Mr. Bradbury; "we're going to the cell now."

To the cell accordingly he marched, and, reaching the door of it, he found the two turnkeys much in the same position as he had left them the night before.

They rose at once, seeing the Governor and sheriffs approach, and bowed very humbly.

"All right?" said Moses Moses, interrogatively—"prisoner all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," returned Miller, with great politeness. "We've never stirred a blessed peg from this door since the Governor left us."

"Then he's sure to be safe—eh, Lupin?"

"Yes, decidedly safe, my dear sir."

"Then," cried Moses Moses, "just open the door, if you please."

The Governor made a sign to the two men to remove the fastenings, trying hard all the while to look unconscious of what was about to take place.

Little dreaming of the discovery they were about to make, the turnkeys pushed open the door.

Miller crossed the threshold with the intention of warning the prisoner that distinguished visitors were about to enter.

But no sooner had he gone far enough to enable him to command a view of the whole interior of the cell than he stood like a man suddenly transformed to ice, while all that escaped his lips was the remarkable exclamation:

"Well, blow my higgledy piggledy!"

The other turnkey, guessing at once something was wrong, jumped into the cell and placed himself beside his comrade.

Then, rolling his eyes around twice with a terrified expression, he uttered a fearful yell.

"Dear me!" said Moses Moses. "What is it?"

"An escape!" said Lupin, with a pang. "Oh, there's an escape—something tells me there's an escape!"

"An escape?" echoed the Governor. "Impossible! I assure you I left him here safe at midnight, as these two men will testify."

Heeding his remarks, the two sheriffs pushed their way into the cell, where the Governor thought it prudent to follow them.

It needed only one glance to assure them all that the cell was untenanted.

The Governor pretended to look astounded.

"Well," he ejaculated, "this passes my comprehension altogether. I left him here safe not many hours ago. Miller, don't you recollect that I did?"

"Yes, sir, I do. I recollect it very well, and I will swear that since then we've never moved our backs from the door!"

"Then how has he got out?" cried Mr. Lupin, in such evident distress that it was plain his appetite for his breakfast had vanished. "By what means has he escaped?"

This led to a close investigation of the cell, which, of course, produced no result except that of convincing them that all was just as it should be, and that there was nothing whatever to show by what means the prisoner had departed.

Had he vanished into air before their eyes, his disappearance could not have been more extraordinary or complete.

For some moments the sheriffs stood staring dumbly at each other, the Governor in the meantime looking at them furtively.

At length, in a very pompous voice, Mr. Moses Moses spoke.

"Bradbury," he said, "you will have to account for this, and it's a very odd thing to me if you don't find yourself in custody before the day is out—indeed, I have a good mind to give you in charge now."

"My dear sir," said the Governor, almost falling flat on his face—"my dear sir, don't utter any such words!"

"But he is gone," said Mr. Lupin, with a shriek—"he is gone, and he has taken my appetite with him!"

"At any rate," pursued Moses Moses, "these two men shall be carefully locked up. They shall answer for their neglect of duty."

Two men more utterly astounded than were these two turnkeys could not possibly be found.

The astonishment depicted upon their countenances was truly a sight to look at.

Had they been by some extraordinary means convinced that they were not in Newgate, but up in the moon, they could not have been more incredulous or overwhelmed.

Mr. Lupin all at once recollected that the Governor had mentioned paying the prisoner a visit at midnight, and so he made some inquiries on that point.

The Governor assured them that he had then left Dick Turpin quite safe in his cell, and that when he opened the door and went out, the men had carefully fastened it.

This, however, did not satisfy the sheriffs.

The more they thought the matter over, and the more they inquired into it, the more freely they became impressed with the conviction that the prisoner had made his escape at least by the connivance of the turnkeys, if not by that of the Governor himself.

At any rate, they determined that a searching investigation should be made.

Mr. Moses Moses started the idea that Dick Turpin might still be somewhere in the prison, and, unlikely as this idea was, it was seized upon gladly by the two turnkeys, who at once desired that the closest search should be made.

They hoped, with all their hearts, that Dick would be found.

They knew their own innocence, but they felt that it would avail them nothing at all.

We have overlooked the friendly turnkey, whose astonishment scarcely exceeded his joy upon finding that Dick Turpin had so mysteriously disappeared, yet when the sheriffs talked about searching the prison he felt fearfully uneasy.

He knew, from actual observation, how close was the watch which the officers had kept all around the prison, and therefore felt certain that by no possibility could Dick have left its precincts unseen.

Trembling, therefore, with dread, he waited with great anxiety the result of the search through the prison.

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXVIII

DICK TURPIN MAKES AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY IN ONE OF THE CORRIDORS OF OLD NEWGATE.

THE rapidity with which the intelligence spread all over Newgate that Dick Turpin had mysteriously disappeared from his cell was something astonishing.

From mouth to mouth the strange story went, until in the huge pile of building there was not a single person unacquainted with it, the prisoners alone excepted.

The utmost consternation was the result, and many were the strange, ridiculous speculations indulged in, all of which were very far indeed from the mark.

Mr. Moses Moses had quite decided upon the necessity of a search, and he suggested to the Governor that until the building was thoroughly looked over the news of the escape should not be suffered to reach the ears of any persons outside.

The Governor, of course, readily fell into his views, for he had no reason to oppose them; consequently, the search having been agreed upon, means were taken to set about it without delay.

"If I might suggest, Mr. Moses," said the Governor.

"Oh, certainly, suggest what you like."

"Well, then, I would propose that we all go to the vestibule and begin our search from that point, because it is from there that all parts of Newgate can be reached."

This proposition seemed such a reasonable one that the sheriffs at once adopted it.

To the vestibule accordingly they went, and, the necessary keys having been provided, they began their difficult and tedious task.

Yet they persevered, for the sheriffs really felt quite a personal interest in the matter, and it would have vexed them exceedingly had the prisoner got out of their clutches.

But there is no necessity for us to accompany them in their search through the vaults and corridors, since we know very well that the search could only result in a failure.

Down to the lowermost vaults and up on to the top of the roof of the building went the sheriffs, the Governor, and a party of turnkeys.

But nowhere could they discover a single trace of the absent prisoner.

Without appearing to have any such design, the Governor carefully avoided going to those damp, underground cells communicating with old Newgate, and as the acquaintance of the sheriffs with the prison was very superficial indeed, they were none the wiser in this respect—in fact, the door at the top of the long flight of steps descending to the coils was always kept locked, and the key was never out of the Governor's possession.

After searching for upwards of an hour, the sheriffs, tired, vexed, and hot, were obliged to come to the conclusion that by some means, supernatural or otherwise, the prisoner had vanished.

It was then that the news was first suffered to go forth, and it was then the assembled crowds in the Old Bailey outside learned the cause of the delay.

It was then the whisper circulated:

"Dick Turpin has escaped!"

His position, however, notwithstanding the failure of the sheriffs to discover his retreat, was by no means a comfortable or enviable one.

For aught he could tell, still closer search would be made, or so close a watch might be kept upon all the outlets of the prison that he would be unable to get away.

All these thoughts pressed heavily upon him as he endeavoured to while away the time by thoroughly exploring the strange place he was in.

As we have already stated, he took the precaution of making the arrow mark at every few yards, so that he should be in no danger of losing his way.

For a long time he found nothing, however, to recompense him for his trouble.

All at once, however, he perceived before him something that looked like a bright, glittering star.

His first impression was that a huge diamond must be lying in his path, of such lustre that it caught the faint light from the lamp he carried and reflected it with redoubled brilliancy.

Not long, however, did he remain under this impression.

With great suddenness he understood the meaning of what he saw.

It was some opening or other looking out upon the day light—perhaps some opening by which he might escape.

To carry his lamp forward with him towards this aperture would have been unwise in the extreme, as he would be in great danger of discovery, nor could he extinguish it, for he had not the materials with him to relight it.

All he could do was to place it down upon the ground in a spot where it was sheltered somewhat from the draught, and then, with his eyes fixed upon the light in front, to grope slowly and cautiously towards it.

It is proceeding he carried out, and found the distance he had to go much less than he had anticipated, for the opening was very small, and as he drew close he perceived that it was crossed and recessed by bars of iron.

It was also high up in the wall above him, and although he could see through it, yet he did not, as he expected, catch a glimpse of the blue sky.

On the contrary, all he saw was something looking very much like the roof of some chamber in the prison.

All at once he arrested his steps, for the murmur of voices came most distinctly upon his ears.

Clearly, then, he was near some portion of the new prison.

As persons were so close at hand, there was a double reason for silence and caution.

On tiptoe, therefore, and pausing between every step, he crept nearer to the opening, hoping that he might overhear some of the conversation that was being carried on.

He was successful, for, without making any noise whatever, he managed to place himself close against the wall, just under the grated aperture we have mentioned.

One of the voices speaking he immediately recognised as being that of the turnkey who had turned out so true a friend to him.

In the conversation itself there was nothing important or interesting, chiefly because it did not concern him or his proceedings.

Yet Dick listened to it intently.

That dreadful feeling of loneliness which had settled at his heart now passed away—he once more felt as though he belonged to this world.

To him there was an inexpressible pleasure in listening to the rude voices and coarse jests of these turnkeys.

After some speculation, Dick decided that he must be close to the vestibule of the prison, for in no other part would the turnkeys be likely to assemble. As he afterwards found, he came to the correct conclusion.

In former times there had been a door close to where he stood, communicating with a portion of the old prison, but becoming disused, the door was taken down and the wall built up. In its stead the grated opening above for some reason or other was left.

Folding his arms and leaning against this wall, Dick remained for some time.

He was disappointed at the result of his explorations so far, and he felt, besides, that he would rather stay there close to human beings than he would remain in some dark lonesome portion of the vaults.

Here, then, he stood when the Governor and sheriffs entered the vestibule as we have just described.

It may be imagined, perhaps, with what interest Dick listened to all that passed between them.

He had expected that Newgate would be searched, and yet when he found they were settling about it in such a determined manner, he could not control a considerable amount of uneasiness that crept over him.

But at length he heard from the turnkeys the delightful intelligence that the search had been given up as altogether hopeless, though there was a probability that it would be renewed.

Having heard that much, Dick was content.

He found himself weary, too, of remaining so long in one place and in one position, and, therefore, creeping noiselessly away, went back to the spot where he had left his lamp.

It was burning steadily and clearly.

Near him was a passage branching off to the right, and

this passage, for want of something better to do, he determined to explore.

But as he looked on he found that there was nothing at all remarkable in its appearance—nothing to repay him for his trouble.

He was about to turn back, when his eye happened to fall upon something glittering on the ground near his feet.

He stooped to pick it up, then examined it by the light of the lamp.

To his surprise he saw it was a small portion of a gold chain that had evidently been broken with a great amount of violence.

To one end of this chain depended a small locket of peculiar manufacture, and in which was the portrait of a young and beautiful girl.

Dick gazed upon this portrait with very strange feelings indeed, and no wonder.

He had every reason to believe that the portion of Newgate he was now in had remained closed up and unvisited for nearly a hundred years.

It would, then, be only natural for him to expect to find that this young girl was attired in the costume of days long gone by.

To his surprise, however—though the word is too weak to express the feeling he experienced—he perceived that her dress was in every way modern—such, indeed, as was then almost universally worn.

Well might such a discovery as this find food for Turpin's thoughts.

Indeed, simply to find a trinket of this description in such a place would be strange enough.

But how came it there?

One thing he could not possibly resist, and that was, that it had fallen there lately.

Who, then, he asked himself, had traversed those passages beside himself—those passages which he fancied had been untrodden for so long?

This was a question to which, of course, he could return no reply, and so, with a vacant, absent air, he continued to turn the locket and chain over and over, and every now and then would pause to gaze upon the sweet, innocent face that had been painted there.

Rousing himself at length from his reflections, Dick carefully consigned the locket to his pocket, then, trimming the lamp, he held it aloft so that its light should be well diffused, and looked around him in all directions with uncommon closeness and eagerness.

Nothing, however, met his gaze, but the strong, damp, stone walls and the little doorways which at frequent intervals broke in upon their evenness.

"This is strange indeed," he muttered, as he took a step forward, "but it will be an odd thing to me if I don't come to some definite conclusion respecting it."

CHAPTER DCCCLXXXIX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS SOME FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE CORRIDORS OF OLD NEWGATE.

CONTINUING to look around him thus closely, Dick Turpin slightly advanced until, having gone about half-a-dozen paces, he found the character of the place he was in altogether changed.

The passage abruptly terminated in a large, peculiarly-shaped chamber, and which, after a brief examination, he concluded must at some time or other have served as a vestibule.

Doors could be seen opening from it, and passages branching off similar to the one from which he had just emerged.

The roof of this chamber gradually got higher towards the centre, and, having paused as nearly as he could tell in the middle, Dick held up the lamp and endeavoured to ascertain its height.

This, however, he was not able to do, for overhead he could see nothing but a huge black patch.

Looking down again upon the ground, thinking perhaps to find some other fragment of the broken chain, he suddenly started.

A strange expression swept over his face, and he seemed inclined to turn aside.

But changing his disposition, he stooped down.

The rays of the lamp then fell upon an object well cal-

culated to make the senses of the boldest sicken with horror.

On the ground was a large spot of blood scarcely dry yet in some places, but evidently fast soaking into and mingling with the damp earth.

Marvelling more and more at what he saw, and feeling now fearfully anxious to unravel the whole mystery, Dick, keeping the lamp close to the ground, tried to trace the blood close to another spot.

But in this he failed completely.

There was no clue to it whatever.

But before him was a passage which seemed to invite him to enter it—at any rate, he strode quickly forward and commenced an exploration of it.

Less than ten strides brought him to the termination of it.

His further progress was barred by a door.

This door was old, worm-eaten, and seemed as though it would only require a slight touch to push it from its frame.

On the side upon which Turpin stood, it was secured by bars and bolts, and these, after some deliberation with himself, and after listening for awhile and finding all silent, Dick ventured to remove.

Pressing gently against the door, he found it opened to his touch.

Beyond all was darkness.

He listened again. But, reassured by the silence, crossed the threshold.

How great was his wonder to find himself in what he firmly believed from its appearance to be the cellar of a house.

In this he might have been mistaken, but soon all his doubts and surmises were set at rest, for going to the foot of a flight of steps that led down into it, he stood and heard distinctly the sound of voices above.

The tones were quite unfamiliar to him, and he was quite certain that it was none of the turnkeys of Newgate he heard conversing, besides, a woman's voice mingled with the others.

The light he carried with him prevented him from observing earlier what now came under his notice, which was that there was a small grating in one portion of the wall, through which a few gleams of light made their way.

Placing the lamp aside, he went close up to this grating, and peered through it.

In front was a small square, recess-like-looking place, at the top of which he could distinguish another grating, lying in a horizontal position.

Now, however, that he had reached this place, he received additional confirmation of his idea, for he could hear the sound of many footsteps hurrying by above, as well as the rumbling of wheels and the trampling of horses' feet.

Clearly, then, he was somewhere near a street, and beyond all doubt he was in the cellar of a house which must mysteriously and strangely have a communication with Newgate.

Retracing his footsteps, Dick closed the door, and examined it.

The fastenings were all upon the prison side of the door, and he felt certain that very many years had elapsed since these fastenings had been removed.

This blew to the winds the hypothesis that he had already raised in his mind to account for the discoveries he had made.

If the fastenings had been removable by anyone in the cellar, the solution to the whole mystery would have been easy; but he felt perfectly confident that it would be utterly impossible for anyone to pass from the cellar into the prison without resorting to the violent means of breaking down the door.

This palpably had never been done, so he was now quite as much in the dark as ever.

Replacing the bars, and pushing the bolts into their rusty sockets, he retraced his steps into the large chamber.

Again he endeavoured to ascertain the height of the roof, but the lamp now burned much more dimly than before, so that he met with no success—indeed, the condition of the light alarmed him a little, and upon examination he found that only a small quantity of oil remained in the reservoir made to contain it.

Perhaps the flame would expire in a few minutes.

At any rate, it could not burn long, and, much as it vexed him to leave the spot, he felt constrained to do so, as to find his way back to the door where the Governor would expect to see him would be perfectly impossible in the darkness.

Accordingly he retraced his steps, and, owing to the excellent precautions he had taken in marking his route, he had not the least difficulty in doing this.

The door was reached, but scarcely had he arrived at it than the lamp, after flickering a moment or two, expired.

He was now in the most absolute darkness, and altogether without the means of dispersing it.

Nothing remained for him to do but to stay just where he was, and count the seconds as they elapsed.

How earnestly he longed for night to come, in order that the Governor might make his appearance.

He could not dare to reflect upon the contingency that some circumstance might arise to make it impossible for Mr. Bradbury to pay his promised visit.

It would be bad enough to consider the evil when it presented itself.

Dick was very weary, and a long time had elapsed since he had slept.

A drowsy feeling now came over him—perhaps caused by the badness of the atmosphere.

He did not attempt to struggle against it, but, sinking down in a curious, uncomfortable-looking posture, dropped off into a profound slumber.

Strange dreams flitted before him, in which the curious and fearful discoveries he had made held a prominent place.

How long he would have slept if left to himself would be a problem difficult of solution, but all at once he was aroused by a slight noise, and, opening his eyes, he saw the door open immediately afterwards, and perceived the Governor standing on the threshold with a lamp in his hand, the brilliancy of which absolutely dazzled him.

That was only because he had been for such a long time in total darkness, and it was a feeling that quickly passed away.

There was a look of anxious care upon Mr. Bradbury's countenance, such as Dick had never seen upon it before.

"You are safe, I see," was his first remark.

"Yes, safe enough," returned Dick, shaking himself.

"I have been asleep—I don't know how long, for the lamp burned out and left me in darkness."

The Governor stared in surprise.

He could scarcely conceive of sleeping in such a place.

But Dick was anxious to know what was going on in the world above, and questioned him accordingly.

The Governor had but little to tell, and nothing that he said was very satisfactory.

A tremendous outcry had been raised by the police and all the authorities, and the prevalent idea in the minds of all was that he was still concealed somewhere in the prison.

"I had hoped," the Governor said, "that I should be able to release you to-night, and, for all I know, it might be accomplished; yet there is such an amount of hazard connected with it that I cannot help shrinking back."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "You fear you will be seen?"

"I do; not exactly that I need care much for the consequences, but still, the letter expressly states that you were to be liberated secretly."

"Yes; and it must be secretly," said Dick, "or, rely upon it, I shall be pounced upon at once."

Dick began to reflect a little.

Perceiving him to be silent, the Governor took from his pocket a small package.

"I guessed you would be hungry," he said, "and so I have brought you something to eat. Here is another bottle of brandy to wash it down with, so you must make yourself as comfortable as you can, and wait until there is a chance of getting free."

"Mr. Bradbury," returned Dick, "I am much obliged to you for all that you have done in my behalf—very much obliged to you indeed, and rest assured I shall not forget it. I should be very sorry, too, to get you into any trouble on my account."

"Oh," said the Governor, "don't mention it!"

"Excuse me," continued Dick, "but I will. Now, I don't think you will be displeased to hear that I fancy I shall be able to make my escape from the prison without your connivance or assistance."

"Indeed! How so?"

"Why, in my explorations through these corridors, I have found a door that, strangely enough, communicates with the cellar of a house which, from the position of it, must be, I take it, somewhere near Newgate Market."

"Indeed!" said the Governor. "I never heard of such a thing. Have you not been dreaming?"

"No, I think not; but, however, if you will leave me the lamp you carry, and take away this one, which has burnt out, I will try what I can do towards effecting my own release. If I succeed, all well and good—you will soon hear of me; if I fail, you will find me close to the door here, and I shall then be obliged to look to you for my safety."

The Governor remained for some moments in reflection.

"If this is really the case," he exclaimed, at length, "I shall be heartily rejoiced, since I shall have nothing further to fear from those who may take it into their heads to watch my movements. I will leave you, then, since you wish it, to your own exertions, and to-morrow night about this time I will, if it lies in my power, creep down to this door, and, if I find you are not here, I shall come at once to the conclusion that you have managed to avail yourself of the mode of escape you speak of."

CHAPTER DCCXC.

DICK TURPIN IS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT HE IS NOT ALONE IN OLD NEWGATE.

"Just so," said Turpin. "And in case I should be gone, as I hope I shall be, just let me remind you about that substantial recognition I was talking about."

"Oh," replied the Governor, briskly, "there's no need to remind me about that—none whatever, I can assure you!"

"Very likely not," said Dick, smiling, "but I only just mentioned it in order that I might give you a caution."

"A caution? Of what kind?" asked the Governor, his timorous nature being at once awoke to danger.

"Why, it is simply this: I would advise you not to take any active steps for finding what is hidden under the old tree for, say, a week at least."

"And may I ask why?" said the Governor, after a pause.

"You may—I have no objection to telling you."

"Why is it, then?"

"Because I think it highly probable that for some time to come your movements will be closely watched by the police officers—mind you, I don't say they will be: I only think it probable, for some of them are such dunder-headed fellows that they might get hold of the notion that you were an accomplice of mine, which would be a very good joke indeed."

The Governor laughed, but rather grimly.

"At any rate," added Turpin, quickly, "it would not be well for anyone to become acquainted with this secret besides yourself."

"No, no—I can quite see the force of that."

"Then," added Turpin, "may we conclude that it is agreed you will not pay your visit to Hampstead for the space of a week?"

"Yes," answered the Governor, with something like a sigh, for no doubt he was both anxious and curious to know what kind of substantial recognition he was about to receive.

Dick's real motive for making this bargain did not for a moment strike him.

It was, however, simply because he knew very well no such treasure was buried among the roots of the tree he described, though he intended to place a reward there for the Governor to find.

He could not tell what might happen to him in the course of the next day or two, and if the Governor got to the tree before him it would be vexing in more than one respect; at any rate, it would seem as though he had spoken falsely.

Now, however, this was arranged, and Dick felt quite contented and easy upon the point.

In conclusion, the Governor said:

"And now, if you will allow me to give you a little piece of advice, and ask you to follow it, don't think it is given from a wish to get out of any further trouble with you."

"I would never think such a thing," said Turpin. "Pray what is it? I am most anxious to hear anything you may have to communicate."

"Well, then, candidly speaking, if you can manage by your own adroitness to get clear of Newgate to-night do not fail to do so."

"I will not," was Dick's reply, spoken with even more earnestness than the Governor's instruction.

"The reason why I advise it," pursued Mr. Braggery, "is that there is great talk of a thorough search through the prison. Hitherto I have been able to keep them from this part of it, but to-morrow some one may step forward who knows all the secrets of this edifice, and a thorough search, in the proper sense of the term, will be made, in which event, should you be lingering here, you would be in great danger of discovery."

"All right," said Dick—"I take the hint."

"And I will depart," concluded the Governor, "for I am desirous not to be absent from my post for any length of time together. My whole thoughts are given to avoid giving cause for suspicions, if I can."

"Very prudent indeed."

The Governor stooped, and, putting down the lamp he had brought with him, the reservoir of which he assured the highwayman contained a good supply of oil, he took up the extinguished one, and said:

"Good night!"

"Farewell!" responded Dick, shaking him by the hand. "I am much obliged to you for all you have done, and I hope I shall not have the pleasure of meeting you again within these walls."

The Governor smiled, and then, evidently wishful to take his departure, stepped out into the outer corridor, fastening up the door as before, and, in spite of the darkness, made his way back to his own apartments without accident.

Dick felt loath for the Governor to go, and, indeed, shortly afterwards wished he had the power to recall him, but it was too late.

Getting into as comfortable a position as he could, Dick partook of the refreshment the Governor had brought, and drank a small quantity of the brandy, after which he felt greatly revived, and ready to embark in any adventure that might present itself before him.

He remained for some moments after he had finished his meal resting his forehead on his hand, and giving himself up to deep thought.

Then, rousing himself, he took from his pocket the locket and chain he had so strangely found.

Once more this underwent a thorough inspection, but nothing more was seen than he had seen already.

He dwelt for a long time upon the pleasing features of the young girl, and, as he returned the trinket to his pocket, he mentally made a vow to use his best endeavours to discover how and by what means it had fallen where he had found it.

Rising, then, and carefully removing all traces of his presence there, Dick took up the lamp, and, with tolerable certainty and confidence, made his way towards the irregularly-shaped chamber, upon the floor of which appeared so terrible and ominous a sign.

Again he made a close examination of this place, without, however, making any fresh discovery except that the increased illumination of the lamp enabled him to obtain a view of the ceiling, a thing he had so anxiously desired.

Instead of finding that the roof continued to slope upwards to a point, as he fully expected it would, he saw that across the upper part of it was laid what looked like a wooden flooring supported on two joists or beams, which, blackened all over by time, were only just distinguishable from the darkness around them.

While thus gazing up, a faint sound from above reached his ears; yet it was a sound, and that it came from the wooden floor above he felt convinced.

Doubtless human beings were at hand, and, as he might consider that all men were at war with him, he was right in fearing detection.

His first impulse, therefore, was to extinguish the lamp,

and this he would most certainly have done, only he recollected just in time that he had not the means with him of reigniting it.

Yet the light of that lamp might show itself through any small crevices that there might be between the boards, and thus his presence become known.

Accordingly, without pausing to reflect, but urged only by an instinct which he did not attempt to resist, Dick hastily retreated down one of the corridors, and, having gone far enough as he imagined, stooped down, and placed the lamp in one of the recessed doorways.

Its light was now almost entirely cut off.

But just at this moment Dick started and almost uttered a cry.

It was only by a great effort of self-command that he repressed it.

The profound silence around was suddenly broken in upon by a sound, the nature of which he could not precisely make out, followed by a rushing noise as of some heavy body falling through space.

Then succeeded a dull, heavy crash, and simultaneously a groan.

Dick's first thought was that his imagination had deceived him, but he was not allowed long to retain this impression, for another groan came fainter but more unmistakably than the first.

Wondering what could have occurred, and undecided how to act—for if he ventured forth with the lamp he might be seen—Dick remained for a moment or two a prey to the greatest suspense.

During that period he continued to hear the faint yet painful groans, and, unable to remain a passive listener any longer, he, in spite of the obscurity, crept gently along the passage.

The distance to the chamber was not great, and upon passing over it he stopped and looked upwards.

He almost expected to see something peculiar up in the roof, but he perceived nothing—at least, nothing but darkness.

The lamp behind him, however, cast a feeble gleam of light along the damp, moss-grown flooring, and Dick strained his eyes in the hope of being able to distinguish something.

While thus engaged, he heard a voice say, though in tones no louder than the faintest whisper:

"Help—help, for Heaven's sake, help me! Have mercy upon me—pray have mercy upon me!"

There was no mistaking the character of this appeal.

Some one was lying there dangerously hurt asking for assistance.

Dick hesitated a second, and then, in the same low tones, answered:

"Speak—speak again, that I may know where you are, and grope my way towards you! Speak again! Why do you not reply to me?"

The silence of the grave, however, reigned around.

Dick felt more and more uneasy every moment, but, shaking off these fears which he despised himself for giving way to, he sank down upon his hands and knees, and, with one arm outstretched before him, crept slowly along the floor.

His motive for this proceeding was, that he considered it would be dangerous to produce the light, lest it should be seen by some unfriendly eye.

Some time elapsed before he was able to make out a dark, dusky-looking mass in front of him, and he would never have perceived it but for the faint gleam of the lamp which we have already referred to.

Again he spoke, but, as before, he met with no response.

Crawling forward a few more paces, he stretched out his arm and touched the dusky form.

It was evidently that of a human being.

The feel of the apparel also told him it was a man, and at the same time he discovered he was either dead or insensible.

Dick no longer hesitated how to act.

A fellow-creature was in difficulty and danger, and it was a natural instinct on his part to assist him.

Seizing him by the shoulders, then, he dragged him slowly along towards the entrance of the corridor where he had left the lamp.

He paused once or twice to rest and to listen.

But the deep silence reassured him, though at the same time it made him feel strangely uncomfortable.

Having entered the passage, however, he proceeded with greater confidence.

He was full of the most intense curiosity to know who this strange being could be, and by what means he had so suddenly and awfully made his appearance in that portion of Newgate which Dick had believed was never trodden by human foot.

CHAPTER DCCXCXI.

DICK TURPIN IS THE AUDITOR OF A MOST EXTRAORDINARY NARRATIVE.

HAVING dragged the stranger as far as the lamp, Dick Turpin laid him down upon his back, and by the aid of the light looked attentively at his countenance.

It was one pleasing enough to look upon, for if its aspect could be taken as an index for the stranger's character, then, surely, he was of a noble nature and of a most generous disposition.

But his handsome features now appeared quite rigid, as though frozen by death, and his eyes only half closed, and his partially-opened mouth seemed to make it still more certain that he had expired.

It might be, however, that he had only swooned in consequence of the fearful injuries he must have received from falling from so great a height.

Dick sincerely hoped that this would prove the case, for it would have been a bitter disappointment to have been debarred from learning the occasion of the stranger's presence.

Remembering the bottle of brandy he had in his pocket, he drew it forth and poured a small quantity in between the young man's lips.

At first no effect could be perceived, but soon there was a flutter, then a struggle and painful gasps for breath.

Dick half raised him into a sitting posture, and then, to his great satisfaction, he perceived a portion of the brandy had been swallowed.

He instantly applied more, which was drunk eagerly.

"Sir—sir," cried Dick, "whoever you may be, be of good heart! I will defend and assist you to the utmost."

"Ah!" said the stranger, dreamily, and drawing his hand across his forehead while he spoke, "is it possible that I have found a friend?"

"It is not only possible but quite true," responded Turpin, as cheerfully as he was able. "Do you not feel much better? Would you like more brandy?"

"Yes, I feel better—very much better. But no brandy just at present—I want to think."

Dick remained silent, and the stranger closed his eyes.

It was tolerably certain that he was endeavouring to collect his scattered thoughts and to remember where he was and how he came there.

All at once he uttered an ejaculation, and in the same breath asked where he was.

"That I will tell you presently," said Dick, "when you have recovered yourself a little more. My presence here is one of the strangest things in the world, excepting, of course, your own, for I believed this place was never entered by human beings."

These words seemed to puzzle the stranger exceedingly.

He was clearly fast getting better, for he was now able to sit up without Dick's assistance.

He moved himself a little closer to the wall, however, and rested his back against it.

Then, in a dreamy, half-sleepy fashion, he fixed his eyes upon Turpin as though wondering who he could be.

"Rouse yourself, sir," said Dick, perceiving the state into which he was falling—"let me entreat you to rouse yourself, for this is no place in which to linger. I wish to leave as soon as possible, yet I am determined not to depart until you are able to accompany me."

"Who are you," asked the stranger, "that you should take so deep and great an interest in a person I believe you have never seen before?"

"No matter who I am," said Turpin—"I am ready to do all that lies in the power of a human being to assist and recover you."

"But from what motive?"

"Humanity and, I confess it, a deep curiosity to know by what means you reached this place."

The stranger glanced around him at the dark, dripping walls, and by his manner it seemed as though he was as much in the dark in this respect as Turpin himself.

"You have a right to my confidence," said the stranger after a pause, and speaking in a more mournful tone of voice than he had done hitherto, "besides, my story cannot be too often repeated, since I have all to gain by the publicity of it, and everything to lose by keeping it a secret."

"Indeed," said Dick. "You inflame my curiosity. If I can assist you further, believe me, I am at your commands, for I do not hesitate to say that, over and above all these peculiar circumstances, there is something in your appearance that has wonderfully interested me on your behalf."

The stranger inclined his head and smiled.

"The time will not be altogether lost," he said, "that I shall consume with my relation, for while I am speaking I trust I shall get stronger and better, and, by the time I have concluded, be able to leave this place."

"So do I," said Dick, "and I have no doubt we shall be successful."

"I will begin, then, by telling you," said the stranger, "that the strongest feeling or passion that I have yet known has been that of friendship—friendship for one I have known almost as long as I can recollect—one who has been to me more than a brother, who is far dearer to me than any brother could be, although I have none."

"In our youth our stations in life were much the same—that is to say, we were possessed of a little, but not enough to live upon without exercising our own industry."

"The very first disagreement—if so I may term it—that took place between myself and my friend was when the time came for us to make choice of our professions."

"You must understand that there was no similarity of temperament between us, which, for aught I know, might have been the cause of our friendship."

"But from his birth—as I may say—my friend, Leonard Wilton, had had a passion for the sea, and he always maintained that, come what would, he would be a sailor."

"Now, on my part, I had the greatest possible aversion to a seafaring life—indeed, so great is my natural antipathy, that often now I cannot bear to look upon the waves, and the very murmur of the waters on the beach thrills me with a most uncomfortable sensation. In anything else I would have given way to my friend Leonard, but in this it was impossible."

"Greatly as I regretted the separation, yet I felt it must take place—there was nothing else that he would turn his thoughts to; he was bent upon becoming a seaman; and I do believe that, had I accompanied him, one voyage would have brought about my death."

"However, I am entering much too closely into details; I will hasten to satisfy your curiosity."

"You must know, then, that it is nearly a year ago since my friend Leonard returned from his last voyage."

"During his absence in foreign lands a great change has come over my own fortunes; a relative dying, has left me in possession of what is to me a large fortune, and I had resolved that when Leonard came back he should go to sea no more, and that I would share this fortune with him."

"It so happened that I was absent in the north when his vessel reached home. I have certain knowledge that on leaving the ship he proceeded to London, but beyond that I can learn nothing in this huge metropolis; he seems to have been swallowed up like a drop of water in the ocean, and to be irretrievably lost."

There was a tone of deep feeling and pathos in the young man's voice when he reached this part of his narration.

"Wondering at his silence," he continued, "I hastened to London and endeavoured to seek him out."

"In vain, however—he was nowhere to be found."

"I was frantic with grief, and so was Lucy."

"Ah! that reminds me that I had not previously mentioned her name. Well, then, she is, as you may guess, a young girl upon whom my friend has bestowed his affections, and to whom he was about to be married."

"She was to join her solicitations to mine that, as

there would be no longer any necessity for him to traverse the ocean, he would henceforth stay at home."

"I pass over without comment what her grief must be like upon learning her lover's mysterious disappearance.

"A thousand conjectures have occupied her mind and mine. I have devoted my wealth without stint, and given the whole of my time for a long time past in the hope of being able to learn something of his fate.

"I have been totally unsuccessful, however; not the slightest clue has rewarded me for my pains."

Again the young man paused and brushed his hand across his brow.

His voice had grown husky while he spoke, and now he endeavoured to clear it.

As for Dick, he was so deeply interested in the narrative that was thus unexpectedly related to him that he really forgot where he was and the strange circumstances by which he was surrounded.

He did not like to urge the stranger to continue, and so for a short time there was a profound silence.

At last the young man resumed his story.

"I have had much dealings with the police," he said, "but they have failed to aid me any further than by uttering surmises.

"Their impression is that this young sailor, on reaching London, was decoyed into one of those places, so many of which are believed to exist, where, if a stranger enters with money about his person, he is never seen or heard of more.

"At last I came to this conclusion. I mourned my friend as one who is dead, but yet I felt impelled to discover if I could by what means he had reached his untimely end.

"I don't like to confess to you that there is still in my heart a faint, lingering hope that I may find him yet living, yet there is such a hope, and it is that which animates me to continue in my course, and that hope will never be extinct until I have proof positive that he is no more."

Dick regarded the young man with the greatest admiration and respect.

He had imagined much from his noble, intelligent-looking countenance, yet he scarcely thought that in the cause of friendship a man would risk and do so much.

In a more rapid voice the young man continued:

"Having, as I say, reluctantly come to the conclusion that my friend had been decoyed into some place and there murdered, as I told you, I devoted myself to the task of finding that place out. At least it would give me some satisfaction to bring such miscreants to justice.

"Adopting, then, almost all disguises, I have roamed London at all hours of the night.

"For some time I had the police with me keeping me in sight; but as I never met with any adventure, and as I came no nearer to my end, I guessed the reason was that the presence of the police officers was known, and therefore I resolved, in spite of the great personal risk, to proceed upon my dangerous adventures alone.

"I did so, but met with no more success than at first, yet I did not despair.

"To pass over all my failures, I will come to the adventures of to-night, though I ought to tell you that I had at last grown weary of my search—indeed, I had almost made the mental determination that if this night passed as the others had I would give up my quest altogether.

"Now, however, I come to the strangest and most fearful portion of my narrative, which I will render you in as few words as possible. The tale is terrible," he added, with a shudder of his whole body, "yet it shall be told."

CHAPTER DCCXXI

IN WHICH THE PRESENCE OF THE YOUNG STRANGER IN OLD NEWGATE IS ACCOUNTED FOR.

THE stranger's eyes rolled so fearfully around while he spoke, that it seemed as though he could scarcely believe he had escaped from the great danger that had threatened him.

Dick, perceiving his agitation, proffered the bottle of brandy, which was gladly accepted; then, after a draught, he concluded his story.

"It was early this evening," he said, "as I was walk-

ing near St. Paul's Cathedral I saw a small crowd of people assembled.

"Everything unusual I had come to consider concerned me, so, quickening my steps, I hastened to see what was the matter.

"Arriving, I found that the cause of the assemblage was a young and beautiful girl, whose countenance looked innocence.

"She was singing in a voice which, for sweetness, I have never known to be equalled. I formed one of the crowd—indeed, the crowd gradually dispersed, though others continually came up.

"But at last this young girl ceased her song.

"Something, I know not what, attracted me towards her; perhaps it was her beauty perhaps the sweetness of her voice, or some mysterious influence beyond my own knowledge. Certainly I remained, and those who had been listening, fearing, I suppose, that the girl was about to solicit a few pence for her song, hastily moving off, I was left alone with her.

"She looked up in my face with a pleasant smile, and, in broken English, made some remark to me, but what the exact words were I cannot recollect.

"I replied by producing my purse, and giving her a piece of silver.

"She was profuse in her thanks upon receiving this gift, and then, placing her hand in a half-familiar, half-timid manner on my arm, requested me to accompany her.

"For a moment I hesitated, and then there came before my mind what I call 'the purpose of my life,' the recollection of it banished my hesitation, and I consented.

"The reason I did so was because I knew full well my friend's impressionable nature, and I thought that had he, upon his arrival in London, met with anyone like this young girl, he would without hesitation have consented to accompany her wherever she went, for he knew no fear.

"In a moment we turned out of the main thoroughfare. I quickly found myself led through a number of narrow passages, the existence of which I was scarcely aware of, although I had travelled London so much.

"I know, however, that these streets, or, rather, passages, exist between St. Paul's Cathedral and the prison of Newgate.

"Coming at length to a house having by no means a prepossessing aspect, I was invited to enter.

"Determined to prosecute the adventure to the uttermost, and hoping to find some trace of my lost friend, I again consented, and soon found myself seated in a room that was furnished strangely at variance with the exterior appearance of the house.

"All this I noted carefully, though my heart beat strangely, for I believed I was on the right track at last.

"Then this young girl poured out for me a glass of wine, and handed it to me. She poured out also one for herself, and I observed that the liquid came from the same decanter.

"The police had often cautioned me against partaking of any drink, lest it should be drugged.

"But this proceeding threw me partially off my guard. However, I raised the wine-glass to my lips, and uttered some silly compliment; but I did not drain the glass—I simply sipped it, perhaps swallowing a tea-spoonful, and I was immediately aware of a strangeness in its taste.

"Just then the girl, having drained her glass, turned half aside to place it on a small table, and at that instant, quick as thought, I inverted my glass.

"The wine that remained fell upon the carpet, the colour of which was dark, and the material soft and woolly; it was absorbed in a moment and no stain was left behind.

"Some more time elapsed, and I was conducted to an upper chamber.

"I had determined to keep all my wits about me, yet to refuse nothing.

"Having entered, the door was closed behind me, and I found myself alone.

"Something in the atmosphere of that room seemed to chill and oppress me, and I gasped painfully for breath.

"Then it occurred to me this was the effects of the drug I had partaken of, and I congratulated myself that



[THE HIGHWAYMEN SEEK SHELTER IN THE SECRET PASSAGE.]

I had not swallowed the whole, although the girl was evidently under the impression that I had done so.

"There was a strange cloudiness in my brain to which I had never been accustomed, which might be attributed either to the strength of the drug or else to the fact that it is rarely indeed that I partake of any intoxicating liquor, as the effects produced make this apparent.

"Rejoiced at this opportunity of finding myself alone, I determined to make a thorough search of the chamber, hoping I should make some discovery worth my while.

"On the table opposite to me I saw trinkets of various kinds, the appearance of some of which struck me as singular, and I advanced with the intention of examining them.

"All at once, however, as I passed over one portion of the flooring near the hearthstone, it suddenly gave way beneath my feet.

"The drug then was exerting its utmost power. I

was dizzy and confused, yet, finding myself falling, I had the presence of mind to endeavour to drop upon my hands and feet.

"Whether I succeeded or not I cannot tell you, for from that moment, until the time when I opened my eyes and saw you bending over me, I remember nothing whatever."

"That, then," said Dick, drawing a long breath, for no words can describe the amount of interest with which he listened to this narrative—"is all?"

"Yes," was the reply—"all. And now I have to ask you, in return, who you are and where I now am?"

"I will answer your last question first," said Dick. "No doubt you will be taken greatly by surprise."

"Where am I, then?"

"In Newgate."

"Newgate?"

"You speak incredulously, and I don't wonder at it."

It is a fact, nevertheless. Not in the new, modern prison, but among the vaults remaining of the ancient edifice."

The stranger's countenance at first expressed great disbelief, but then he ejaculated:

"Yes, extraordinary as this may seem, I cannot doubt it. The position of the house—these strong, damp walls, all confirm your statement."

"Well may you be taken by surprise," said Dick, "for I believe the very existence of this place is guessed at and known by very few."

"I never heard of such a thing," he murmured.

"No," said Dick, sinking his voice and pointing upwards; "but those above evidently know all about it."

The young man shuddered; but then, his thoughts reverting to his fresh companion, he looked upon him with undisguised amazement as he said:

"But if this is a portion of old Newgate, how comes it that you are an inhabitant of it?"

"You can scarcely call me such," said Dick. "I am here for refuge. As for myself, I don't care to speak much. I am here. I have offended against the laws, and I am looking for some means of escape."

"Then," continued the young man, still gazing upon him, "am I right in conjecturing that you have escaped from the modern portion of the prison into this?"

"You can surmise what you please," was Turpin's answer. "But it will please me better if you will look upon me as one ready to do all in his power to serve you. Believe me, I am anxious to stand your friend. The adventure you have recounted deeply interests me. I should be glad indeed to bring it to a solution."

"The brandy," said the young man at this moment—"pass me the brandy! I feel once more sick and faint!"

"Very likely," said Turpin, as he complied with his demand. "Drink a little—not too much, and you will soon experience the benefits of it."

"I feel to have new life," answered the stranger. "And now tell me—what do you propose shall be our next proceeding?"

"That's a difficulty," returned Turpin. "It seems to me, however, tolerably clear that you are at last on the right track."

"Do you mean for discovering the fate of my friend?"

"Yes."

"It may be so—it may be so! How easily he would have fallen into such a trap as was laid for me! He would be totally unsuspecting—I was on my guard."

"It's a miracle to me," said Turpin, "how you could have escaped with such slight injuries."

"It is wonderful," returned the young man—"wonderful indeed!"

There was a silence, for Dick just then was thinking of the locket he had found, and was wondering whether by any chance it might belong to the young sailor of whom his companion spoke; if so, the coincidence would be remarkable in the extreme.

"You are silent," said the young man, at length. "Am I right in supposing that you are considering in your own mind which will be the best step for us to take next?"

"Scarcely that," said Dick; "and yet, to go back to a consideration of what you have related, it seems tolerably certain that the young girl who so interested you is regularly sent out in order to decoy people to this place."

The stranger nodded.

"Then, having arrived, they are drugged, and, falling through the treacherous trap-door on to the ground beneath, are killed."

"That's it—evidently it."

"And you," pursued Dick—"rely upon it, you are not the first who has fallen a victim to this snare. I may tell you that I found a spot of blood upon the ground, which looked as though it had fallen there recently."

The young man shuddered.

"I can't bear to reflect upon what would have been my fate!"

"Such a place as this," Dick went on, glancing around him, "would afford every facility for concealing the dead bodies of their victims. They would be plundered of every article of value about their persons, then flung into some of these cells."

This was a very probable supposition indeed, and the stranger felt it to be so.

He could tell, also, by Dick's manner what was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Suppose," said Turpin, "that we satisfy ourselves upon this point, and not remain contented by surmise. It will be easy to ascertain whether in any of these cells are such traces as we seek."

The stranger's face blanched as he said:

"If it is so—and I cannot doubt it—what an awful sight the opening of one of these doors will disclose!"

"Awful indeed," returned Dick Turpin, "yet I consider we ought to satisfy ourselves by one hasty glance."

"Be it so, then," returned the stranger. "I am content to leave that point for your decision."

CHAPTER DCCCXCIII.

IN WHICH THE YOUNG STRANGER DISCOVERS THE FATE OF HIS FRIEND.

Dick rose, and, taking the lamp in his hand, went towards the doorway nearest to him.

The fastenings were all upon the side on which he stood, and he could perceive no difficulty in removing them.

He lifted down the bar, drew back the belts, and yet he hesitated to push the door open upon its hinges.

Fixing his gaze earnestly upon the young man, who was either too much injured by his fall or else lacked the courage to look into that disused cell, for he remained in the position he had all along occupied, Turpin said, earnestly—nay, with solemnity in his tones:

"Do you think you are prepared to receive the worst confirmation of your fears?"

"I am—I am! Something comes over my mind at this moment that tells me my friend was lured into that house of death, and that he met the fate designed for me!"

Dick bent his head, and then, in lower tones, responded:

"That, too, is my impression. And now, pardon me a moment if I ask you a question about your friend's affianced wife—Lucy, I think you said her name was. Are you well acquainted with her features?"

"As well as with my own!"

"Would you recognise her, then?"

"Most certainly!"

In his anxiety, the stranger slowly rose to his feet, and stood looking at Dick wonderingly.

Dick said no more, but at once pushed the door open. It was fortunate he stood aside, for such an overpowering effluvia came forth that, had he not done so, he would inevitably have been suffocated.

Sickenings with horror, he waited a few moments; then, raising the lamp, went to the threshold of the cell.

"Come," he said, addressing his companion, "look in also. I don't wish a second glimpse."

Tremblingly, the young man obeyed.

The sight presented to their gaze was indeed a truly fearful one.

Lying in this cell, which was one of considerable extent, were many human bodies—all dead, all bearing marks of great personal violence upon them; some looking as though they had only just been cast into that strange sepulchre, while of others nothing but glistening bones remained.

The appearance of the light caused a tremendous scuffling in the cell.

Dick knew well enough what it was

His friend, however, seemed much alarmed.

"It's the rats," he said. "No doubt they swarm in this place by myriads. Look—look! Over yonder in the gloom you can see their eyes shining like so many bright points. They are dangerous creatures," he added, "and may not hesitate to attack us. Have you seen enough?"

The stranger turned away, and, deeming that a sufficient answer, Dick, with very great satisfaction, closed the door and bolted it.

Turning round once more to his companion, who now was as pale as ashes, he said:

"How long, say you, is it since your friend reached London and mysteriously disappeared?"

"Twelve months."

"Indeed? so long? Then it is in vain to search among these poor relics of humanity hoping to discover something of him; by this time he must be unrecognisable."

"Yes," returned the young man, "and I am glad this is so."

"Glad?" repeated Turpin, in surprise.

"Yes, because now I can still entertain myself with a doubt that he may not have perished in this foul manner. I have yet no confirmation of it, nor do I see what evidence is to be obtained."

"No," said Dick. "Yet, would it not be best to know the worst at once, and so resign yourself to it? If something was found clearly pointing to his presence in this place, would you not accept that as sufficient testimony that he has perished?"

"Yes," said the stranger, gloomily, "if that could be I should indeed give over my long search."

"And your dangerous one," said Dick, "for every day you are perilling your life. Think what a narrow escape you have had on this occasion."

"I do think of it: but I think more of the manner in which you speak; I could almost believe that you possess some such evidence as that you speak of."

"And if I do," said Dick, "would it not be best for me to produce it?"

"Perhaps so—perhaps so."

"Well, then, I confess, without further hesitation, that by chance I found upon the floor, close here to where we stand, a small trinket. It puzzled me beyond all measure to account for its presence in so strange a spot; now, however, I have the key to all."

"What kind of trinket?" asked the stranger.

"A locket."

"Let me see it—let me see it! Pray let me look upon it!"

"I will; but prepare yourself for confirmation of your friend's untimely fate. In the locket is the portrait of a girl, young and beautiful."

"Yes—yes! Lucy—Lucy!"

"Lucy no doubt; but satisfy yourself by a glance. It is there."

While he spoke, Dick dropped the locket into the young man's extended hand.

No sooner did his eyes fall upon it than he uttered a deep groan.

Some moments elapsed before he could recover himself sufficiently to gaze upon it a second time.

"Yes—yes!" he said, at length, in a broken voice. "I am doubt no longer. Well do I remember seeing this locket? The chain is broken now; but it is of gold, and was of rare workmanship. Before he went to sea, Lucy placed it round his neck with her own hands, and entreated him to wear it always for her sake."

"No doubt he did so," answered Turpin, "and his murderers in their haste let it fall upon the ground."

"That's it—that's it!"

Dick could see that the young man the more he thought about his friend's fate was the more overcome, and he endeavoured to change the subject of his thoughts.

"Bear with me a moment," replied the stranger. "I shall be better soon. Oh, Lucy! how will you withstand his awful blow? What will be your feelings when you hear the awful tale? Who could have thought that this gift of yours would prove the means of clearing up the mystery of his death?"

At that moment a peculiar rumbling noise attracted their attention.

Dick held up his hand for silence.

At the same time he placed the lamp as much out of sight as he could.

The rumbling continued, and, pressing his companion's arm, Dick stepped forward noiselessly.

The young man followed.

When near the end of the passage, Dick stopped, and looked upwards.

The trap-door in the ceiling was now thrown open, and on the edge of it was a lantern.

The light from this shone upon the top portion of a ladder which had been lowered into the abyss.

It was this ladder, then, which had produced the strange rumbling noise.

Voices were heard speaking in suppressed accents.

Then a man's head appeared above the edge of the trap-door.

He looked down for some time intently.

"I don't see him," he muttered—"I don't see him! Yet he must be there—of course he's there! Curse it! What makes me feel so nervous and terrified to-night—I feel half afraid to go down!"

"Afraid?" said another voice. "That's a good joke. Here—take a drop of this; it will give you courage."

"And will you come down too, mate?"

"Of course I will."

"Then here goes."

The man, having thus spoken, placed his foot upon the ladder and began to descend.

He took the lantern from the floor, and carried it in his hand.

"Now, mate," he cried to the other, "come along; we'll both descend the ladder together."

The other man obeyed, and, keeping as close together as they could, the two villains went slowly down, step by step.

Dick and the young man gazed upon them with the utmost abhorrence.

As for Turpin himself, he felt that it would be wrong to treat them as he would any other adversaries.

Clearly he was justified in taking them by surprise, and overpowering them without allowing them an opportunity to retaliate.

Accordingly, with a swift, noiseless footstep, he made his way to the centre of this circular apartment, if so we may term it.

The men were now about half-way down.

Dick stood close to the foot of the ladder.

He had already made up his mind what to do, and so with a sudden exertion of his whole strength, he seized hold of two of the bottom rounds in the ladder and pulled with all his might.

The effort succeeded.

With an awful crash the ladder fell, carrying the two men with it.

The lantern rolled far away into a corner, and was extinguished.

The men were so taken by surprise as to be thoroughly frightened.

An attack in that quarter surely could not be made by human beings—they had at last been encountered by the inhabitants of another world.

Dick hurried forward, calling out to his companion at the same time to bring the lamp.

He was obeyed.

The two villains, hearing his voice, recovered some of their composure.

Their greatest fear now was over—they had to encounter mortals, not beings of another world.

Accordingly, despite the fearful injuries they must have sustained in falling from so far so awkwardly, they struggled to their feet and commenced an immediate attack.

Dick, however, was prepared for them, and had every advantage, although he was unprovided with any weapons.

With his clenched fist he struck one such a violent blow that it put his rising again altogether out of the question—at least, for some time to come.

The other shared a similar fate, and by the time the young man arrived with the lamp, the two wretches were lying insensible on the ground.

At the sight of them the stranger could scarcely restrain his fury.

Insensible as they then were, he felt impelled to attack them with the utmost rage.

"Now," said Dick, "it strikes me we have the way before us to get out. Help me to raise the ladder once more."

With considerable difficulty the ladder was lifted up and placed in its original position, and no sooner was this done than Dick and his companion mounted.

On reaching the top, Turpin found himself in a bed-chamber such as the young man had described.

It was untenanted by anyone.

Looking at the trap-door, they saw it was so constructed that the least weight pressing on one end of it would cause it to give way, allowing the object, whatever it might be, to fall through.

As soon as this was accomplished, the spring at the other end restored the trap-door to its original appearance.

"Have you a mind to linger here and make a further examination," asked Turpin, "or will you seek the way into the street with all speed?"

"I leave the conduct of affairs entirely to you," was the response—"it seems to me that you are better able to judge which is best."

"Then I advise that we gain the street with all speed. Who can tell how many accomplices those miscreants may have? And if we stay we may find ourselves opposed to a superior force, and so have to pay the penalty of our rashness with our lives."

"As you will," answered the young man; "the very air in this place seems to choke me."

There was indeed, either in fancy or reality, a sickening odour pervading that apartment.

Gladly enough, then, Turpin left it.

The door opened upon a large square landing-place.

Here he paused in order to look around him before he took any fresh step.

The staircase was broad, with massive, old-fashioned balusters.

It ascended to the upper floors, and descended into the hall, commanding a view of the front door of the house.

CHAPTER DCCCXCIV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIS WAY TO THE THREE SPIDERS INN AT EALING.

DICK TURPIN, having attracted the attention of his companion, raised one arm and pointed down the staircase.

"There," he said—"there is the way to escape; that's the front door which you see before you, and surely we shall have but little difficulty in descending the stairs and passing out of it unseen."

"Very little, I should think," replied the young man. "Let us try it without more delay."

Dick was glad enough to find that this young man was willing to leave the house.

As for himself, the reader need not be told he was anxious to depart.

Maud and his comrades would all be wondering what had become of him, and anxiously expecting his return.

Gently descending the staircase, then, for about half a dozen steps, they paused.

Some faint, sweet notes of music struck upon their ears.

After listening for a moment they felt sure they proceeded from a harpsichord.

The air was indeed a delightful one, and whoever it might be who was then playing was most certainly a perfect master of the instrument.

Merely raising his finger in token of silence, Dick continued the descent.

On gaining the foot of the stairs, however, his companion stopped, and, touching Dick upon the arm, he said, in a faint whisper:

"That is the door leading into the room where I drank the drugged wine; that's the room from which the music proceeds, for I remember seeing a harpsichord standing in one corner."

Dick nodded, and would have passed on, considering that had nothing to do with him.

But other thoughts were evidently in the mind of the stranger, for, in the same cautious whisper, he continued:

"Perhaps by this time some other victim may have been picked up, and that music is played in order to soothe him into a kind of repose, when he will fall all the more unsuspectingly into the snare."

Dick started and wondered how it was that this thought had not occurred to him at first.

"Closer," he whispered—"let us get closer, then we may overhear something."

The next moment they were standing on the threshold of this room, and then, for the first time, they noticed that the door was not properly closed—it was ajar, but only very slightly.

This indeed accounted for the fact of their having heard the low, sweet strains of the musical instrument.

All at once the music ceased, and then the two listeners distinctly heard a voice say, in thick, guttural accents:

"Very pretty, my love—very pretty; but I have had enough music of this room too, for that matter. Come away with me, before the day."

"In a moment," said a female voice. "Excuse me just a moment, I will soon return, but I am not certain whether all is ready."

"All is ready?" repeated the other voice. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing—don't trouble yourself about matters that do not concern you. There's wine on the table—don't spare it."

There was a rustling sound, and Dick whispered to the young stranger:

"Seize her when she comes forth—hold her fast."

He had scarcely time to pronounce the words before the door opened.

The girl—for the stranger recognised her instantly—was quitting the room precipitately, and was made a fast prisoner before she was aware of it.

Feeling herself firmly held, and seeing, too, the pallid countenance of one she had so recently betrayed, she uttered a piercing shriek and became insensible.

These strange occurrences had the effect of arousing the inmate of the room, and now, with a staggering and unsteady step, he came towards the door.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What the deuce does it all mean? What is it—what is it? Why, curse me, I feel quite drunk and stupid, and yet I've had nothing—only a glass or two of wine!"

"You have been drugged," shouted Dick, "and but for our accidental presence you would in a few more minutes have been murdered."

Certainly, if any words whatever would be calculated to enable a person to cast off the influence of a drug, such as those just uttered by Dick would have that effect.

He was a tall, stont man, expensively dressed, and with many ornaments of great value glittering about his person.

By his countenance, his guttural articulation, and his general appearance, it could be told at a glance he was a foreigner. Probably he had only just arrived in London.

Hearing these words spoken, and comprehending their purport, he clasped his hands over his forehead, doubtless with the endeavour to stop the swimming of his brain.

"Get into the open air," said Dick, "and raise what outcry you can, and return thanks that you have had so narrow an escape."

Like one in a dream, the foreigner found his way to the front door.

With difficulty he undid the fastenings and sallied forth.

While he was thus engaged, Dick spoke rapidly to his companion.

"From what you know," he said, "I cannot take any part in bringing the inmates of this house to justice. I myself should be immediately taken prisoner. I can, however, leave all to you. My immediate object now is to make my escape. That girl is now incapable of doing any mischief. Raise what alarm you can, and relate the whole to the police."

"I will—I will," replied the young stranger, with a slightly bewildered air. "And since we are to part, accept my thanks for the very valuable services you have rendered me."

"Not a word on that point—not a word. Farewell! Most likely we shall never meet again."

With these words on his lips, Dick turned round and quickly darted from the house.

The last he saw of the foreigner was as he stood near the front door endeavouring to save himself from falling.

It would have been no slight satisfaction to Dick could he have remained and witnessed the clearing up of this transaction, but regard for his own safety made him aware this was impossible.

Keeping a keen look-out on all sides of him, Dick hastily made his way through the streets of London in the direction of the Three Spiders Inn at Ealing.

The clocks gave forth the hour of eleven.

He was surprised, for he imagined it was much later. In the perpetual darkness, however, which prevailed in old Newgate, it was difficult indeed to keep any accurate note of the flight of time.

So far as he could tell, no police officers had observed his departure.

Either they had given up keeping such vigilant guard around the prison, or else it had never occurred to them to place a watch anywhere near the house from which Dick had emerged.

Although the hour was early, yet he felt no inclination for the long walk before him.

He was impatient in the highest degree to assure Maud of his safety, and also to ascertain what were the movements of his comrades.

He had no horse, however, and to attempt to hire one would be running a very considerable risk—a much greater risk than he felt himself justified in running.

At a rapid pace, then, he walked on towards his destination, for above all things he was anxious to leave London behind.

On his way he revolved in his mind what means he could adopt of performing his journey quickly.

His meditations were at length broken in upon by the sharp rattle of some vehicle that was being drawn with great rapidity along the high-road.

Dick drew aside, and looked back.

Then, through the darkness, he managed to make out that a light spring cart, drawn by one horse, was approaching him.

In it was seated a man, who, by various ~~and~~ smacks of his whip, compelled the animal to keep up its speed.

"I'll ask him for a lift," muttered Dick. "There's a little danger in it, but not much; and, after all, he may refuse."

Just then the cart was within a yard or two of where he stood.

Raising his voice, he cried:

"Hoi—hoi!—stop! I am travelling your way, and would give something worth while for a ride!"

The man checked his horse somewhat abruptly, and, placing his hand before his eyes, strove to make out by whom he had been accosted.

"It's only a slight favour that I ask of you," said Dick. "But this road is terribly lonely, and I have a long journey before me."

"It ain't very safe to pick up acquaintances on the road," said the man. "But, though I can't see your face, yet I like the sound of your voice. Jump up, and, if you like to pay for something when we reach the Truss of Hay, I shall be glad of your company."

"Agreed!" said Dick. "I am much obliged to you!"

He scrambled up into the cart while he spoke, and the man, scarcely allowing him time to seat himself, cracked his whip, and set the horse in motion.

It was a great satisfaction to Dick upon thus finding himself unexpectedly carried so swiftly towards his destination.

But he found that his present position, advantageous as it seemed, had some drawbacks, for the man was of a most inquisitive disposition, and it was with difficulty that he replied to his many questions.

The great topic of the time was, of course, Dick Turpin's marvellous escape from Newgate.

He found his new companion had plenty to say upon it.

Dick professed to be ignorant of the particulars, and thereupon was favoured with a narrative of a most exaggerated description.

Sinking his voice as he concluded, he said:

"It's my firm belief, sir, that there's but one way of coming to a solution of this matter."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "And what may that be?"

"Why, we all know what a villainous wretch this Dick Turpin is— But, bless me! what's the matter?"

Dick had started upon hearing this epithet applied to him, but he recovered himself most marvellously.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said—"nothing at all!"

"Then what was it made you give such a jump?"

"I don't know—it is not worth while to trouble about it. I am full of curiosity to know what you were going to say."

"Well, then, my belief is that Dick Turpin was such a wretch that the devil would not wait for him to be put out of the world in an ordinary manner, but has carried him off bodily. Rely upon it, we shall never see him again."

"Perhaps not," replied Dick. "But what are you pulling up for?"

"Why, this is the Truss of Hay—the inn of which I spoke. Recollect you have to pay for the refreshment."

"All right," said Dick—"order anything you like!"

The cart having stopped, the man jumped out, and requested Dick to follow his example.

At first he refused, but, being pressed by his new companion, and having no good reason to give why he should prefer remaining where he was, he at length reluctantly got down.

"Come in!" he said. "They keep the best of refreshments here, as you will say. They do a roaring trade, for there are plenty, like me, who make a regular point of calling."

He pushed open the inn door as he spoke.

Dick had no resource but to follow him, though he was exceedingly reluctant to do so.

He had no means of disguising himself further than by pulling his hat low down over his brows.

A couple of flaring oil-lamps depending from the ceiling lighted up the passage leading from the front to the back of the inn, and from rooms on each side came forth the sounds of boisterous merriment.

Dick's companion walked up to the bar window, and, after a brief hesitation, called for a tankard of old ale.

"I will share it with you," said Dick, "for I am in no humour for drinking to-night."

"Very good," was the reply. "I shall not stay more than a moment. I am very late to-night, and I have twenty miles further to go."

Dick did not reply to this, but, throwing down the only coin he possessed to pay for the ale, he drank a small quantity himself, and his companion quickly emptied the tankard.

But just as they were taking their departure, one of the doors leading into the passage opened, and a man's face appeared at it.

Behind him were several others, who, it seemed, were likewise just about to quit the inn.

The door being narrow, he stopped with the door in his hand to allow Dick and his companion to pass by.

The latter walked carelessly enough, but Dick, affecting to be seized with a sudden cough, placed his hand before his mouth, which served to conceal a great portion of his features.

Apparently no notice was taken of either of them, and in another moment they were mounted, as before, in the light cart, and rolling rapidly along the high-road.

The tankard of ale loosened the man's tongue considerably, and he ran on at a great length upon various subjects.

But Dick had too many things pressing on his mind to pay much attention to what he said.

Arriving at last pretty near to the Three Spiders Inn, he requested the man to allow him to alight.

"This is your journey's end, then?" he said.

"Well, nearly. I have a little further to go across the fields, but no distance to speak of. Many thanks to you for your civility. Good night!"

"Good night!" answered the man, smacking his whip.

Dick stood in the roadway a minute or so till the cart was almost out of sight, then, turning round abruptly, he made his way in a straight line for the inn.

He reached it without meeting with any accident, only once he thought he heard a footstep on the road behind him, and, glancing back at the same instant, he fancied he perceived a dark figure dart into the shadow of the hedge.

Of this he was by no means certain, but, occupied only with his anxiety to see his friends, he hurried on with redoubled speed, nor paused until the door was reached.

He knocked several times gently without receiving any answer, and, his patience being by no means great, he raised his foot and kicked with might and main upon the lower portion of the door.

CHAPTER DCCXCV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN'S JOY AND SATISFACTION PROVE TO BE OF SHORT DURATION.

THE reader will now be at no loss to understand the meaning of the tremendous knocking that had struck

such terror into the hearts of Tom Davis and the highwaymen.

It was Dick who was thus clamouring for admission, not the officers, as they supposed.

After the words last spoken by Tom Davis, a *some* of considerable confusion ensued.

There could be no doubt, however, that the *ought* course to pursue was to avail themselves instantly of the hiding-place they had been at so much trouble to construct.

Seizing a lamp, Tom King cried:

"Follow me, all of you—follow me quickly, yet quietly! There is no cause for immediate alarm."

Maud, however, was so terrified that she could scarcely move.

Knowing perfectly well, however, that not only her own safety but the safety of those she held so dear, depended upon her summoning up sufficient resolution to accompany them to their hiding-place, she tried her best to shake off the dreadful feelings which oppressed her.

Passing hastily through the bar, Tom opened the door at the top of the steps leading into the cellar, and quickly descended.

Claude came last, and shut the door.

In the meanwhile, the knocking was continued with great fury.

Tom Davis, thinking that the highwaymen were now safe, and not wishing to give rise to fresh suspicion by keeping the officers waiting at the door, slowly walked along the passage, and presently cried out:

"Who is it?—who's there?"

"Open the door, Davis," cried Dick—"open the door! Why on earth have you kept me here waiting in this manner?"

Tom Davis recognised the tones of the voice instantly.

So great was his surprise—so sudden the revolution of feeling which took place in his breast upon finding the captain was without, and not Jack Marshall and his officers, that he was suddenly bereft of all motion.

Leaning against the wall, he could only gasp out the words:

"The captain—the captain!"

Ellen had heard Dick's voice, and uttered a shriek.

When that was over her surprise was over too, and accordingly, hastening past Tom Davis, she, with nimble fingers, removed the fastenings.

Dick pushed open the door hastily, and as hastily closed it behind him.

"What on earth," he said, "is the matter with you all? Why have you kept me hammering at the door in this fashion?"

Tom Davis did not reply, but recollecting all of a sudden that the highwaymen had gone down into the cellars, and were doubtless in the act of entering the secret passage, he turned round and ran into the bar.

Opening the door at the top of the steps, he cried out:

"Tom—Tom! Come back! It's all right! The captain's here!"

There was an immediate commotion down below after he had pronounced those words.

The fact was, so expeditious had the highwaymen been that the secret passage had been opened, and they were just about to close it after them.

Tom Davis's words arrested their purpose, and, with mingled joy and doubt, they rushed pell-mell towards the steps.

Dick could not for the life of him understand the extraordinary behaviour of Tom Davis; but Ellen, in a few words, explained the exact position of affairs.

Over the glad meeting which now took place *to* must pass in silence, since it was a scene no pen could possibly describe.

The most extravagant joy was, of course, the feeling uppermost in every breast.

No sooner, however, were their surprise and satisfaction over than a whole string of questions were poured forth.

Nothing would do but Dick must give an account of all his proceedings, for there was not one who could even guess at them.

Willingly enough, Dick complied, and amid a profound,

breathless silence, he related to his friends those facts which are already in possession of the reader.

He concluded his narrative by stating that he fancied he had heard a footstep behind him in the lane, and that he had seen for a moment a dark figure resembling a human form.

"We cannot be too careful," said Tom Davis—"it is impossible that we can be. I will go now and see that all the fastenings are perfectly secure."

"And Black Bess," said Dick—"I must see her."

"She's all safe and sound, captain. But if you suspect any person is lurking near, don't run the risk of venturing forth just at present—wait for another opportunity."

This advice was warmly seconded by the highwaymen, and Dick gave way before their wishes, although his anxiety to see Black Bess was great indeed.

Tom Davis was not absent long, and when he came back he brought with him the satisfactory intelligence that the inn was firmly secured at all points—that it would be impossible to effect a sudden entrance.

It was now Dick's turn to question his comrades, for he was quite in the dark as to their proceedings, and was not a little anxious to receive from Tom King the account of his adventures at Windsor.

His request was complied with, and surely, to all appearances, a happier, more comfortable party than was assembled in the inn kitchen at that moment could scarcely have been found in England.

Had a stranger looked in upon them, the very last idea that would have suggested itself would have been that they were all in peril of their lives.

A feeling of remarkable ease and contentment pervaded every breast, and such a sensation of security came over all that they never remembered to have felt before.

Those feelings, however, were very quickly put an end to by what next occurred.

In the midst of their laughing conversation there suddenly came a pause—such a pause as not unfrequently takes place in similar circumstances.

They glanced from one to another, and each waited for some one to speak first.

In the midst of this singular silence came the sound of three distinct heavy blows struck deliberately upon the front door.

This startled all into life.

Tom Davis turned perfectly white as he said:

"There's no mistake now—officers they are, and no one else—it cannot turn out to be any friend of ours this time! Be quick!" he added. "Seek the secret passage without delay!"

"Nay," cried Dick, "let us know first that there is reason for doing so."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the knocking was renewed.

Then some words pronounced in a loud voice reached their ears.

What the words were they could not exactly make out, but Tom Davis exclaimed:

"Now are you satisfied? Did you hear them utter their usual summons for admission? Captain, you fancy did not mislead you, you have indeed been watched and followed to this house. What is to be done?"

"Enter the secret passage," was Dick's immediate answer. "I fear it is only too true that I have been followed. However, it strikes me if they should enter they will be unable to find anything of us."

The knocking was repeated for the third time, and the words again pronounced.

Tom Davis had crept a little closer to the front door.

Turning round, he said in a whisper:

"Did you hear them demand admittance in the King's name? If the door is not opened instantly they will break it down."

His words were prophetic, for just at that very instant a *terrible* blow was dealt upon the stout panels of the door.

Had it not been so well secured, most certainly that blow was sufficient to have forced it from its hinges.

No longer now could the imminence of their danger be doubted.

Again snatching up the lamp, Tom King hastened to the bar.

He was followed by Dick, who had to half carry Maud with him.

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack brought up the rear. Once more the steps were descended, the cellars crossed, and the entrance to the secret passage reached.

It turned out now that their false alarm had really done them good service.

The coverings over the passage had now been removed, and nothing remained for the highwaymen to do but to enter hastily and replace them.

This, by an admirable, yet simple contrivance that had nevertheless cost them many hours' thought, was quickly done.

"Forward," said Dick—"it will be useless to linger here! Let us take up such a position that, if necessary, we may make an immediate retreat."

"Good!" cried Tom King. "I was about to propose the self-same thing. Follow me with what speed you may."

As he spoke he walked hurriedly along the passage.

CHAPTER DCCXCVI.

DESCRIBES THE ENERGETIC PROCEEDINGS OF JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS.

It will be necessary now to go back a little in order to account for the events which next occurred.

It will be recollected that on the night when Dick Turpin so strangely made his escape from Newgate, his three comrades left the White Horse Inn in Drury Lane.

As they had correctly feared, the deaf and dumb boy whom Matthew had so befriended was a traitor.

He had recognised the highwaymen, and no sooner had he started upon his errand than he betrayed them to a police officer.

His scheme no doubt would have succeeded, and the highwaymen beyond all doubt have been captured, had not his long absence been too much for their impatience.

The simple fact of going to the stable instead of waiting at the corner of White Horse Yard unquestionably saved their lives.

With what followed the reader is already aware.

With more than usual ease, Tom and his comrades managed to out-distance the police officers.

Still, although the highwaymen had got out of sight and hearing, they were by no means inclined to abandon the chase, especially as, after going a short distance, they were met by a troop of their companions headed by Jack Marshall himself.

A few words served to explain matters to him, and no sooner had he comprehended all, than for about five minutes he did nothing but curse the officers in every conceivable way.

"They went westward, did they?" he cried. "Well, we'll go westward too. Come on, it's strange indeed if we don't see or hear something of them."

Accordingly, the two parties forming one, set their steeds in motion and galloped at a very furious rate along the western road.

From time to time they paused to make inquiries as to whether any persons resembling those of whom they were in search had passed that way.

But on every occasion they were replied to in the negative.

At last, reaching a roadside inn, Jack Marshall determined to pause.

He had been actively engaged for a long time and so so weary that he could scarcely sit in the saddle.

Moreover, most of the horses were completely blown, and, if pushed, might fall altogether.

It so happened that this inn was no other than the Truss of Hay, at which, as fate would have it, Dick Turpin made a halt.

Having stayed long enough, as they believed, to rest their horses, the police officers were just about to depart when Dick and his companion passed down the passage in the manner we have previously related.

The officer standing at the door did not recognise Dick, yet he fancied that he was no other than the highwayman he beheld.

Had he seen him under any other circumstances than the present, probably he would have had no doubt whatever.

The very idea that Dick Turpin should quietly walk into the inn where they were staying, and walk out again, was really too preposterous to be entertained.

Still, he looked vacant, hesitating and confused.

Percceiving it, Jack Marshall bawled out:

"What the devil are you standing shilly-shallying there like that for, Roberts? What's the matter with you? Are you moon-struck?"

"No, no, Mr. Marshall—no, no. I beg your pardon, sir."

"Well, what is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Well, sir, I'm afraid you will laugh at me, or think me drunk, or mad, or something of that sort, but I really do believe—and yet how can it be possible?"

"Go on!" roared the chief police officer. "What do you believe?"

"Why, that when I opened this door I saw Dick Turpin walk down the passage."

Jack Marshall leaped up from his chair with a yell.

He seized hold of Roberts, the police officer, and shook him violently.

"Fool!—dolt!—idiot!" he screamed. "If you had any doubt of that kind in your mind why did you not speak, and not stand there looking like a fool? Bah! Get out of the way!"

He flung the officer aside with great violence, then made his way to the bar window.

"Landlord," he cried, "who was it passed down the passage a minute or two ago—did you notice 'em?"

"Were there two of them, sir?"

"How the devil do I know?"

"Well, I only ventured to inquire," said the landlord, offended at Jack Marshall's manner.

"Well, supposing there were two, what were they like?"

"Why, one I know very well—he's an old friend of mine, and calls regularly here every time he passes."

"Yah!—bah! it can't be him then!"

"But," continued the landlord, "now you mention it, he had a stranger with him, and rather a strange-looking stranger, if I may be allowed to make that remark."

Jack Marshall pricked up his ears once more.

"Describe him," he cried, fiercely and excitedly—"describe him!"

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I can't very well, for he very carefully kept as much out of sight as he could; he had his hat drawn down on his face, and altogether I saw but little of him."

"Was that the man you meant?" roared Marshall, addressing himself to Roberts, who had ventured to emerge into the passage.

"Yes—yes!" he replied, nodding violently—"that's him!"

"Then, no doubt you are right. What a chance we've lost! But quick—quick, all of you! The horses are ready, no doubt! Mount at once!"

Probably never before had Jack Marshall been in such a state of tremendous excitement.

He dashed out of the inn more like a madman than a sane being.

In the same haste, he mounted his steed, and then plunged his spurs into its flanks.

"Come on," he roared—"come on, I say! Do you mean to be all night?"

As well as they could, the officers scrambled into the saddles, and followed their leader in a desultory throng.

Now, had the officers galloped straight off to the Three Spiders Inn they must inevitably have arrived there before Dick.

But such was fated not to be the case.

Jack Marshall, indeed, was very forcibly reminded of the truth of the old proverb which declares "more haste less speed."

Altogether letting passion get the better of prudence, he paid less attention to his horse than he should have done.

Consequently, the tired beast, making a false step, stumbled.

His rider was not ready to save him by checking at the bit, so down he went, and Jack Marshall involuntarily performed a very creditable somersault over his horse's head.

He reached the ground with great violence, and just as he fell, so did he lie, bereft apparently alike of life and motion.

The officers pulled up their horses as quickly as they could, and narrowly escaped riding over their chief.

The struggling horse was assisted to rise, and others bent over their leader.

"Mr. Marshall," said one—"Mr. Marshall! Speak! Are you very much hurt, sir—very much hurt?"

There was no response.

"He's stunned, if not dead!" said another.

"Is he?" cried Roberts, pushing his way forwards. "Then, d—n him, let him take that! I feel better now. Perhaps when he feels that slight pain in his side he'll think twice before he tries to throttle me again!"

Roberts was still smarting with rage at being treated in such a summary manner by his chief.

All the way along the road he had been cursing and swearing to himself, longing for some opportunity of revenging himself, and wishing that his tongue had dropped out before he had said a word about Dick Turpin at all.

Seeing his powerful foe helpless on the ground, he could not resist the opportunity of gratifying his vengeance, so while he spoke, and before any of the others could prevent him, he dealt Jack Marshall a furious kick in the ribs—so furious a one that it is a wonder it did not recover the police officer from his state of unconsciousness.

A consultation now ensued among the officers as to what they should do.

Would it be best for them to wait and endeavour to restore their leader to consciousness, or should a portion ride on in pursuit?

This matter was well argued, for the police officers were about equally divided on the point.

The discussion soon grew so warm that it was a thousand wonders they did not come to blows.

As it was, the confusion was something terrific, and in the midst of it Jack Marshall was altogether disregarded.

But what the furious kick could not do, Nature accomplished for herself.

Gradually the chief police officer came to himself.

As may be guessed, his intellects were at first in a state of utter confusion.

But by degrees he realised that he was lying on his back in a very dirty road, that every time he drew his breath he had an acute pain in his side as though some one was stabbing him, and that his men were all standing around, disputing at the top of their voices.

At least five minutes elapsed, however, before he could recollect just what had occurred.

No sooner did remembrance return to him than he uttered a yell.

Its effects were peculiar.

The police officers ceased their discussion at once, and became suddenly as silent as though they had been struck dumb.

Certainly the circumstances were well calculated to exasperate anyone, and so we cannot wonder that the first thing Jack Marshall did after giving vent to that yell was to pour out a whole string of curses directed at all things in general, and at his own men in particular.

"Help me up," he said—"help me up at once!"

The officers came officiously towards him.

On attempting to gain his feet, however, Jack Marshall suffered such intolerable pain that he alternately cursed, groaned and screamed.

Rage certainly had the better of him on that occasion.

Comprehending that it was his horse's fault that he had been thrown, he made a rush at the dumb, unconscious brute, and commenced a furious attack upon it—an attack that was in the highest degree ridiculous.

But Mr. Marshall was soon exhausted, and fell back again into the roadway.

"Take me back to the inn," he said—"oh, take me back to the inn!"

With great difficulty this command was obeyed, but, as the inn was only a few hundred yards in the rear, it was quickly gained.

A plentiful external application of cold water and some deep draughts of brandy went far towards restoring Jack Marshall to his former self.

So absorbed had he been by his own injuries that, up till that moment, he had forgotten all about his purpose.

Just then, recollecting Dick Turpin, he angrily demanded to know why the officers had not continued the pursuit.

This involved a long explanation, to which he would not listen.

"Hold your jaw!" he cried. "I've had enough of it! Another drop of brandy! There, I shall do now! Come on, will you! I will once more lead the way!"

By the joint exertions of about half a dozen officers, Jack Marshall was lifted into the saddle.

He suffered more from the pain in his side than aught else.

To draw a long breath was agony.

"Gently," he said—"we must do it gently, or I shall fall off! But there's time enough—time enough, for it's odd to me if I don't know where to find them all!"

CHAPTER DCCCXCVII.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS SUCCEEDED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE THREE SPIDERS INN, AND MADE THREE PRISONERS.

ALTHOUGH Jack Marshall may be said to have used the utmost expedition, yet, after all, a considerable delay took place in consequence of the unforeseen accident which befel him.

Indeed, before the officers started for the second time from the Truss of Hay, Dick Turpin had got comfortably back to the inn.

At every step the horse took Jack Marshall suffered extreme pain, but he bore all like a martyr.

He was encouraged to do so by the hope that on this occasion he should succeed in capturing the whole of the highwaymen.

He had an unusually large force, and, from the direction that Dick was taking, he had scarcely any doubt in his own mind that he was making direct for Ealing.

As fast as he possibly could, Jack Marshall followed in his footsteps, until, at length reaching the disused lane leading up to the inn, he paused.

"Jackson should be somewhere here," he muttered. "I wonder whether the rascal is at his post!"

While speaking, he took from his pocket a small whistle, which he placed to his lips.

A shrill, trilling sound was produced—not very loud, but yet such as would be carried to a great distance.

No sooner had the sound died away than hasty footsteps were heard, and then a man, attired as a police officer, made his appearance.

"Oh," he said, speaking with great excitement, "is that you, Mr. Marshall?"

"Yes, it is! What news, Jackson?"

"Oh, most important news. I've been cudgelling my brains to think of some means by which I could let you know, and here you are just in the nick of time!"

Jack Marshall smiled, and forgot the pain he was enduring.

"I've seen him," continued Jackson, sinking his voice—"I've seen him, and I was a good mind to put a bullet into him, and chance it."

"Seen who—seen who?" asked Marshall, impatiently.

"Why, Dick Turpin himself—I am quite sure of it. I would swear to him! He passed me."

"Why did you not seize him?"

"Because I was alone," was the reply, "and he was so close to his friends. Had they heard the least noise they would have come forth, and I should have been no better than mincemeat."

Marshall thought so too.

"Perhaps it is best as it is," he answered. "How fortunate it is I left you here."

"Very fortunate indeed, sir."

"You dogged his footsteps, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where did he go, then?"

"To the inn."

Jack Marshall nodded.

"I thought as much."

Then, speaking to himself, he added:

"Oh, I have you on the hip now, Mr. Landlord. I knew that this day would come sooner or later."



[TOM DAVIS REFUSES TO BETRAY THE HIGHWAYMEN.]

Having made this reflection, he turned round and addressed his men.

"Follow me, all of you," he said, "as slowly and as silently as you can."

He was obeyed, and, making no sound that could be heard above the roaring of the wind, the police-officers crept like so many ghosts towards the Three Spiders Inn.

They reached the front of the building without having given the least alarm.

In a whisper Jack Marshall ordered his men to dismount.

Short as the time had been, yet it had sufficed for him to make up his mind as to the exact course of action he should adopt.

He placed his men like so many sentinels round the inn, and so closely together that they could communicate by whispers.

No. 184.—BLACK BIRD.

With the bulk of his men and the horses he remained close to the front door.

"Now the worst of it is," he said, addressing his men, "that we must go through a little legal form; but pay attention to what I say."

The men were all attention.

"It is quite certain," he began, "that Dick Turpin is within that building. You know what sort of a reward we shall get for him, and that's enough to make us try our best. And then I am almost equally certain that his comrades are with him, therefore understand this."

The men were profoundly attentive.

"We dare not break suddenly into the house and seize them, though that's what I should wish to do; we must call upon them three times to open in the King's name."

The men nodded, for they knew perfectly well.

"Provide yourselves, then, with a stout piece of wood and deal a couple of hard blows upon the door with the

end of it. I will then call upon them to surrender in the usual form. Directly the words have left my mouth strike the door again. I will repeat the summons, and, having done so, try to demolish the door at one blow. This will give them no opportunity of concealing themselves—they will not have time. If we make one grand rush we shall carry all before us."

The men fully comprehended all that he said to them, and were moreover highly pleased with the arrangement: it suited them exactly.

"To conclude," added Jack Marshall, "so anxious am I that you should make this capture that I will give up my share of the reward entirely, and the whole sum shall be divided equally among you all."

Certainly if anything could have urged the police officers to do their best this announcement on the part of their leader ought to have had the effect.

Had it been prudent they would have expressed their satisfaction by a cheer.

Such a proceeding as that was quite out of the question; they had everything to gain by silence.

Without much trouble, a piece of wood that exactly suited their purpose was found.

It was the trunk of a young tree that had been cut down recently, and the branches of which had been lopped off.

About half a dozen officers seized hold of this piece of wood, which thus became instantly a formidable battering-ram.

Retreating to a little distance, they ran at full speed towards the door.

The blow was a tremendous one.

It was followed by another, and then Jack Marshall, repeating the usual formula, called upon the inmates to open the door in the King's name.

Without waiting to see whether any attention would be paid to this demand, he stood aside to allow his men to renew their attack, which they did with a vigour that delighted him.

Again he called, and again the door was battered upon.

But it was stout, and strong, and well secured within, and calculated to stand a great deal of battering before it would give way.

Yet Jack Marshall fancied that it already shook upon its hinges.

The summons was given for the third time, and Jack Marshall said:

"Now, my lads, one blow! Give it with all your might, and the door is down."

The officers ran forward with a will.

This time they fully expected to carry the door before them, and so went at it with terrific force.

But they were deceived.

The stout oak withstood them, and so great was the shock, that they could not possibly recover themselves from it.

Their hold upon the trunk of the tree gave way, and the whole of them fell sprawling to the ground.

"Up again," cried Marshall—"up again! To it—to it! The door cannot hold against many blows like that!"

Hastily and angrily the officers scrambled to their feet.

The block of wood was again raised and once more battered against the door.

This time, however, they were careful for their own sakes to strike more gently.

"Harder—harder," cried Jack Marshall—"harder! There ought not to have been a quarter of this delay! You are giving them every opportunity for concealment."

Just as he spoke, one of the upper windows in the inn was flung open, and Tom Davis, with a huge, conical nightcap on his head, made his appearance.

This advent was greeted by a general yell, and there was an immediate suspension of hostilities.

"Oh, murder," he cried—"murder! Thieves—thieves! What shall I do all alone by myself? Thieves!"

"You blockhead!" roared Jack Marshall. "We are no thieves, as you are full well aware—we are his Majesty's officers!"

Some of the men had provided themselves with links, and, having lighted them, they came closer beneath the window at which Tom Davis stood.

The ruddy light shed around by these torches revealed

plainly enough the peculiar dress of the officers, and it was impossible to remain longer in any doubt concerning them.

"Why, is it you, Mr. Marshall?" cried Tom Davis, affecting the utmost astonishment.

"Yes, of course it is. Come down and open the door this second, or I'll break it from its hinges!"

"I'm coming, Mr. Marshall—I'm coming," said Davis, who had made his appearance in this manner solely with the view of gaining time.

"Make haste, then!" roared Jack Marshall. "None of your tricks! We know you!"

Tom Davis grinned, and pretended to be attiring himself with great speed.

About two minutes elapsed, but the patience of the police could extend no longer than that.

"You refuse, then!" cried Jack Marshall. "Now, my lads, to it again—we'll soon have the door down!"

Another blow was struck, and this time the stout oak panels were split from top to bottom.

The men uttered a cheer at their success.

"Stop—stop!" roared Tom Davis. "Consider how you are destroying my property! I'm coming—indeed I am coming!"

He retreated from the window as he spoke, but Jack Marshall, resolved to wait no longer, gave the signal for a fresh attack.

This last blow effectually did the business.

With a tremendous crash the door parted in the centre, and the police poured in in a body.

Before they had gone half a dozen paces down the passage they met Tom Davis.

"Seize him," roared Jack Marshall—"seize him—make him your prisoner—bind him securely, and take care that he does not escape!"

Tom Davis protested vigorously, but to no purpose. He was seized by a dozen powerful hands, and, before he was aware of it, securely handcuffed.

Two men remained in charge of him.

"Now, my lads," said Jack Marshall, "don't be afraid! We have them—depend upon it we have them; no one could leave these premises unseen; and at the least attempt to do so, the sentinels will raise the alarm. The men we want may be hidden somewhere; but if so, we can take our time and search till we find them. Come on, this will be the best night's work you have ever done."

He dashed into the kitchen as he spoke, and here, in genuine terror, were Mrs. Davis and Ellen.

"Seize them both," roared Jack Marshall—"seize them—make them prisoners! I have sufficient evidence that they are all accomplices! Keep them secure, and if we don't quickly find out the highwaymen, we'll make them confess which is their hiding-place."

His commands were carried out with unnecessary roughness.

Mrs. Davis and Ellen were both prisoners and securely bound.

With great speed the police officers then spread themselves over the ground floor of the inn, but in none of the rooms did they find any trace of the highwaymen.

By no means discouraged at this, Jack Marshall sent a portion of his force upstairs to search the upper rooms, while with the remainder he proceeded to the cellars.

CHAPTER DCCXXVIII.

JACK MARSHALL AND HIS OFFICERS DISCOVER THE DOOR IN THE STABLE.

As soon as ever the highwaymen had descended the cellar steps, Ellen, acting upon the instructions given her by Tom Davis, had locked the door and taken out the key, which, also by his directions, she threw into the fire.

The object for this proceeding is obvious enough. It was merely to delay the officers and so give the highwaymen more time to make their exit by the secret passage.

Jack Marshall knew his way to the cellars perfectly well; but when he arrived at the door, to his great anger and disgust, he discovered it was fast and the key gone.

The Three Spiders Inn was an old place, and every part of it was built in the most substantial manner.

Even this door, although only seeming to communicate

with the cellars, looked as strong as though intended for a prison.

It was perfectly possible to force it, but, from his experience at the front door, the chief officer felt sure it would take a considerable time.

Furious with rage, he returned to the kitchen, in which some of the officers remained on guard over the three prisoners.

Marching direct up to Tom Davis, Jack Marshall clonched his fist and shook it threateningly in his face.

"You rascal!" he said—"you villain! I have long had my suspicions of you, and now they are verified! Deliver up the key of the cellar door. I command you to do so in the name of the King."

"And I solemnly declare that the key is not in my possession, nor do I know where you will find it."

"This subterfuge will not avail you in the least!" roared the officer. "I ask you once, calmly, whether you will deliver up that key? You can refuse or not, just as you like, but if you do, I will take care that it is mentioned at the time of your trial, and you will find it will help to go against you."

"I cannot do so," said Tom Davis, affecting a contrite air. "If I could it would be a different matter, but I can't."

Jack Marshall uttered a curse.

He saw there was no hope for it—the door must be broken down.

As he turned away once more with the intention of returning to the bar, one of his men stepped up to him, and, after a preliminary cough, ventured to touch him gently on the arm.

"Mr. Marshall, sir," he said—"Mr. Marshall."

"Well, Saunders, what is it?"

"Would you mind, Mr. Marshall, if I made you just one suggestion? An idea has come into my head—really, sir, quite an idea."

"You don't mean it," said Marshall.

"I do indeed, sir."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Why, sir, I think we have forgotten the stables. We ought to have gone there almost in the first instance, and taken possession of the horses; that would have cut off all hopes of their escape."

Jack Marshall gave quite a start.

This was really a fresh thought to him, though when it was suggested to him he wondered how on earth it was he had overlooked anything so obvious and important.

Far from his intention, however, was it to allow his subordinate to indulge in the belief that he had made so grave an omission.

Accordingly, turning to him, he said:

"It's quite a good thought of yours, Saunders, but you must not imagine for a moment that I had forgotten such a palpable thing as that."

"Oh no, sir, not for the world," returned Saunders, with a smirk and a bow.

"Indeed," continued Marshall, "when you spoke I was wondering whether we should go to the stable before we broke open this door or afterwards."

Saunders was silent.

"We'll go there at once," said Marshall, after a momentary pause.

Assembling his men round him, he instructed two to use their best efforts to break down the door.

With the remainder he sallied out into the yard at the back of the inn.

Although well aware it would have been the wisest and most prudent course to secure the horses in the stable first of all, yet Jack Marshall did not feel uneasy on this score, simply because he believed himself yet in good time.

His men had kept the closest possible watch at round the premises, and had anyone attempted to leave, an alarm would have been given.

His first act upon gaining the yard was to accost an officer who was standing there.

"Is all well?" he asked. "Have you seen or heard anything?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Marshall—all's well."

"The just pass the word round, will you, for all to keep an extra good look-out? We shall unearth them presently."

Scarcely raising his voice above the pitch in which this conversation had been carried on, this sentinel spoke.

His words were heard by two men standing on either side of him, and from mouth to mouth the orders flew, and in a moment of time the intelligence had made a complete circuit of the inn.

The lighted torches carried by some of the officers enabled them to see all around them, and this was fortunate, for the night was one of unusual gloom.

On arriving at the stable door all was found to be perfectly quiet.

The door was closed and securely padlocked.

If Jack Marshall had had any apprehensions—which he had not—they would have vanished then.

How could the highwaymen have entered the stable and locked the padlock on the outside?

That was manifestly an impossibility.

So his omission was of no importance at all.

In his own mind he felt certain he should not have committed so great an oversight but for the confusion of his faculties, caused partly by his heavy fall from his horse and partly by the excitement he felt at being in so fair a way to capture Dick Turpin.

One smashing blow with a heavy stone served to demolish the padlock at once.

The stable door flew open.

"Lights!" cried Marshall—"lights, I say! Be quick!"

The officers carrying the links pressed forward, and directly afterwards the whole interior of the stable was well lighted up.

The first thing Jack Marshall did was to utter a most fearful yell.

His men thought for a moment that he must have met with some sudden, severe accident.

"Done!" he said—"we're done—we're too late, after all!"

While he spoke, he glanced despairingly around him.

But the stable was empty.

Not a horse stood in one of the stalls, except the one kept by Tom Davis, though, by the signs of confusion around, it was evident the place had been very lately visited.

"Look about you," were the next words Jack Marshall spoke—"look about you! The scent is warm yet—they can't have got far away!"

At the same moment, recollecting the little door at the back of the stable, the existence of which he had on a former occasion discovered, he hastened towards it.

It was bolted on the inner side, but, regardless of that incontestable proof that the highwaymen had not passed that way, he opened the door, and immediately found himself confronted by one of his men.

"Have you seen them?" roared the chief officer at the top of his voice—"have they passed this way?"

"No, Mr. Marshall, that they certainly have not."

"Are you quite sure?—has not one left the stable?"

"I am positive of it—at least, not from this part. I am quite certain."

"Well, have you heard anything?"

"Nothing particular. I heard the horses kicking and prancing about, and I heard one neigh; but I thought nothing of that."

Upon hearing this, Jack Marshall poured out a torrent of imprecations—he seemed somewhat eased by this process; and, having settled it in his own mind that the blame was all attributable to this one man, he turned back with the view of discovering, if possible, by what mysterious means the highwaymen had got their horses out of the stable unseen.

With regard to this point, he was as much in the dark as ever.

Among his men the universal opinion was that the highwaymen had entered and left the stable by some secret, unknown door, and accordingly they set abut looking for it, which was something particularly in their line.

For some moments they were baffled, but all at once, as they were scratching the loose straw from the flooring, one man uttered a loud shout.

"A trap-door!" he said—"a trap-door! Look here now, who would have thought of that?"

The men all pressed eagerly around him, and then they saw by what means the trap-door had been discovered.

It was through a pure accident, but for which they might have remained in entire ignorance of it.

Evidently, however, the trap-door had been closed in haste, and care had not been taken to clear away the straw close around the edges, consequently, when it was let down, a portion of the straw was wedged in between the trap-door and its frame.

Jack Marsall saw this, and gnashed his teeth.

"I might have guessed it—I might have guessed it! They have been here all along, as I suspected, though I never could arrive at any proof. They have had plenty of time to construct secret passages and suchlike, in anticipation of the coming of a day like this. They did not calculate upon that, however," he concluded, pointing to the trap-door.

The men saw the gesture, though they did not exactly catch the import of the words he spoke.

They concluded, however, that his desire was the trap-door should be raised, and accordingly they bent all their energies to this task.

With much greater ease than they had dared to anticipate, the trap-door was raised. It was thrown back quite flat upon its hinges; then, to their astonishment and admiration, they saw a gently-sloping pathway, leading downwards into the earth—a pathway perfectly practicable for horses' feet; and indeed all doubt was set at rest as to the highwaymen having gone that way, for the ground of which the pathway was composed was damp and soft, and left very clearly the impression of the horses' footprints.

At this moment, however, a loud cry was simultaneously set up by the officers who formed the cordon round the inn.

This cry, coming suddenly upon the ears of those in the stabling, arrested their steps.

The noise becoming louder still, Jack Marshall dashed out of the stable into the yard again, being fully under the impression that the highwaymen had been seen while attempting to quit the premises.

In this he found himself deceived; but a great surprise was in store for him.

At the first glance, he saw that nearly the whole of the inn was one mass of flames.

How it had caught fire no one knew, and the flames had spread with such rapidity and so universally that the first alarm given to the officers was the whole simultaneously bursting out into a blaze.

The fact was, the inn had been built chiefly of wood, and this, through age, had become excessively dry—indeed, it was scarcely possible to find anything more inflammable.

The officers in the inn, keeping guard over the prisoners, were almost the last to know what had happened.

When, however, they came out into the yard, the roaring of the flames was something terrific.

It was scarcely possible for even an astute officer like Jack Marshall to remain altogether unmoved and unbewildered at so extraordinary an occurrence.

There is to all people a fascination in a fire on a grand scale.

For several moments, then, he, in common with his men, could do nothing but gaze upon the grand and awful sight before them.

Every moment the flames increased in volume and brilliancy, while showers of sparks flew about in every direction.

It was not until the roof of the old inn fell, with a tremendous crash, almost smothering the fire, that Jack Marshall recovered proper possession of his faculties, and remembered what ought to be done.

Raising his voice so that it was heard distinctly above the roaring of the flames, he cried:

"Keep an extra look-out, all of you—keep a good look-out! I am confident they are not far away!"

These orders were quickly transmitted from one to another, until all were made acquainted with them.

And now the fire, recovering from the effects of the fallen roof, broke out afresh with additional vigour.

Tom Davis, his wife, and Ellen gazed upon the destruction of their home with saddened feelings.

They felt there was an end to the careless, happy life they had led so long.

Just as had been their residence there, they had

grown to like the place, and it would ever be endeared to them by its associations.

In a few hours from that moment nothing would be left of it save a heap of mouldering ruins.

They wondered also when they should gaze upon that spot again, more especially Tom Davis, for he better comprehended the dangers of the position in which he stood than of the rest.

Neither his wife nor Ellen had an exact idea of the peril of their position; but Tom himself knew that the punishment of aiding and abetting felons was most severe, and in his case he was well aware that the full rigour of the law would be enforced.

After particularly bidding his men to look sharply after their prisoners, and take care that they did not by any sudden movement escape, Jack Marshall, collecting his men around him, once more bade them follow him into the stable.

When he returned to it, he felt annoyed at the interruption that had ensued.

Most certainly it would have the effect of allowing the highwaymen to get further away, not that this gave any very great uneasiness, for the idea he had formed in his own mind was that the highwaymen had cleverly constructed some subterranean retreat to which they could betake themselves, and remain in security till all danger was over.

The discovery of the trap-door, he felt, was a thing they had not calculated upon, so, bidding his men to be as silent as possible, he commanded them to follow him.

Several carried lighted links, and by the aid of these the nature of the place they were in was disclosed.

In spite of his anger, and vexation, and hurry, Jack Marshall could not forbear from giving expression to the admiration he felt at what he saw.

CHAPTER DCCCXCIX.

RETURNS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.

WE now return to the highwaymen and Maud, who, it will be remembered, we left in the secret passage.

Without any delay or accident, they reached the inclined plane leading up to the door of the stable.

As Tom King carried the light, he now stood aside and allowed Claude and Jack to pass him.

With nimble fingers, they undid the fastenings, and raised the trap-door.

"Courage—courage, dear Maud!" said Dick to his trembling companion. "Be of good heart, for while you are with me you are safe! Depend upon it, long before the officers can search the inn we shall be far away."

Maud was slightly reassured by these words, for she had too often been in situations of danger with Dick not to place some confidence in his powers.

Moreover, she saw that his comrades, though rapid in their movements, appeared by no means discomposed.

Dick pressed on eagerly, for he was anxious once more to place himself beside Black Bess.

A long time had elapsed since he had seen her last, and he had gone through many vicissitudes.

As soon, therefore, as the stable was gained, he released Maud's hand, then hurried to the stall where Black Bess was standing.

The intelligent animal recognised her master at once, as was evidenced by her actions.

She neighed and pawed the ground.

A keen sensation of pleasure shot through Dick Turpin's heart when he perceived this manifestation of pleasure and recognition.

"Woa, lass!" he cried. "Quietly—quietly! Then you managed to get home safely after all? Well—well, I suppose you are right by this time, and in readiness for a long gallop?"

Not forgetful of the injury his gallant mare had received, Dick now raised her mane in order to inspect it.

He was highly gratified to find that it had entirely healed, and there was little to fear in the future of the consequences arising from it.

In the meanwhile, the highwaymen had been busy caparisoning their steeds.

Dick, reminded of the flight of time and the necessity for immediate action, now followed their example.

The saddle and bridle were quickly placed on.

"Are you ready Dick?" said Tom King, in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, quite ready."

"Then come on, or the sooner we leave this stable the better."

Dick advanced, leading Baud by one hand and Black Boss by the other.

Tom King followed, leading his own horse and Claude's.

Sixteen-String Jack carried the light and led his own steed, Claude Duval being left to replace the trap-door.

This he did with every imaginable amount of caution.

He was anxious to leave the top of the trap-door covered with straw, and, as he believed, he had not left any sticking in the crevices in such a way as to betray them.

It is certain, however, that he must have done so.

All felt greatly relieved when this much was over.

The distance to the opening of the passage was still so considerable, yet they did not apprehend any interruption to their progress, and they believed that, upon emerging from it, they would not be seen or molested by anyone.

Without waiting another moment, they pushed forward.

As they proceeded, they could not avoid casting glances of admiration upon their own work.

The difficulties in the way of excavation had been great, and, in order to keep the roof and sides of the passage from falling in, they had been obliged, with great care and labour, to prop them up by means of beams and planks of wood.

When close to the opening from the passage, and at a spot where, from the looseness of the soil, they had been compelled to put up more supports than elsewhere, Tom King suddenly cried:

"Halt! It is just possible," he said—"indeed, it is very likely that the officers will be clever enough to find out the entrance to this secret passage. Who can tell what has taken place since our departure?"

"Well, well, Tom," said Dick Turpin, "what of that?—why do you pause?"

"Because," he said, "I have an idea."

"Well, then, speak quickly."

"If the officers should find out this passage, and make their way along it, they will be very quickly indeed upon our track. It would be a good thing to put a stop to their progress, and that can be done by—"

Tom did not say any more, but explained what he meant by a gesture.

"You would let the passage fall in?"

He nodded.

"It might be worth our while," said Dick. "Who can say? But, then, we may involve ourselves in great danger by making the attempt."

"I think not," said Tom. "But you must decide quickly—shall it be done?"

"I will leave it with you to decide," returned Turpin.

Tom found that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack heartily approved of the scheme.

Having constructed the place, of course they knew the best and easiest way for demolishing it.

Accordingly, certain of the posts were loosened, and planks removed.

The earth began to fall in very fast.

"If we had such a thing as a rope handy," said Tom King, "we could do it easily. One pull at the post, and then down the whole must come."

"Try it without, Tom," said his companions. "Give a smart pull, and then run back."

Despite the imminent danger of being crushed by some of the falling earth, Tom did not hesitate to adopt this course.

Before he had completed his purpose, however, he was warned of danger by a cry from his companions.

He turned, and hastily retreated.

Well was it for him that he was so hasty in his movements.

With a strange rushing, crashing sound, the roof of the passage fell in.

Tons upon tons of earth came down, and effectually stopped up the passage.

"There," cried Tom, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction, "I rather think the officers will find it difficult to follow us now! We shall be able to get a good start."

This little matter being over, they pushed on at increased speed, in order to make up for the time they had lost.

By the fresh, cool air that blew upon their faces, they could tell how near they were to the mouth of the passage.

In a few moments more it was reached, and, as there was no longer the necessity for a light, it was extinguished.

Slowly and cautiously they made their way out among the trees.

As soon as they had all assembled, they looked up, and were astonished to perceive that the sky was tinted with a brilliant red.

Clouds of smoke, too, could be seen rising up above the tree-tops.

For some moments this spectacle was gazed on in silence.

Dick Turpin was the first to speak.

"They have burnt our house down," he said. "It is perfectly certain that the inn is on fire. There's no other building hereabouts."

"I wish we could tell exactly what has happened since our departure," returned Tom King. "But no matter. Doubtless we shall have enough to do in looking after our own safety."

"Depend upon it we shall," said Turpin. "My own escape from Newgate—the fact of my being tracked to this place, as no doubt I have been, will create a tremendous commotion everywhere, and great efforts will be made to capture us."

"It appears to me," said Claude Duval, "that before we go any further it will be necessary for us to hold a kind of council of war and decide upon the nature of the proceedings we should next take."

"Exactly," returned Dick. "I was about to make the same remark myself. Suppose we all give our views upon the subject, and then decide? I don't think we are in much danger of molestation here."

"Nor I," returned Sixteen-String Jack, "though very likely as soon as we attempt to quit the cover of these trees we shall be seen. It is a desperate, well-organised attack that they have made. All their preparations are doubtless very complete."

"For my own part," said Tom King, after a short silence, "I am in favour of a separation—of course, a temporary one."

"And I—and I," cried Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both together, so that it was evident the same idea had occurred to them.

"There are many good reasons for adopting such a course," said Dick Turpin, to whom they all now looked for a decision; "but then, for my own part, I am sorry that we should separate. One would think that we should gain strength by union."

"No doubt we should," said Tom King, "but then, how much that would increase the chances of being seen. Here are five of us—quite a large party I may say—and wherever we go we must attract a good deal of notice."

"Certainly more than when alone," said Dick Turpin. "But how is it you intend to separate?"

Tom King questioned his two companions, and found that they, like himself, had decided upon going singly.

"It will be best, Dick," Tom continued—"much the best, for one can get out of the way and escape when two or a greater number could not possibly do so."

"You shall decide among yourselves," answered Turpin; "I will not attempt to controvert you in such a matter; I don't wish it. If you think our separation will conduce to our safety, let us part."

"But not until we have arranged for some meeting-place," said Tom King, quickly. "We must name a certain place and time, and we must be there by some means or other."

But where?

This was the point that set them all thinking.

It was hard to decide which place would be best suited

for such a purpose, and where they would be least likely to meet with an interruption.

It was at last resolved that the meeting-place should be on Hampstead Heath, near a tree in a lonely, desolate part of it, which was well known to all of them.

This had the advantage of being at no great distance from the metropolis, and yet it was lonely, for in those days, when the Heath was in the open country and more than double the size it is at present, few people ventured to turn aside from the badly-kept roads which intersected it.

"The hour," said Dick, "may as well be midnight; it is easily remembered, and by that time all will be quiet."

"Agreed. And now when shall the meeting be?"

"I should advise," replied Dick, "that we all seek out some place of concealment and endeavour to lie hidden until this disturbance blows over. Being thus apart, we shall probably be able to accomplish this very important object—what say you?"

"The advice is good—it could not possibly be better. How long shall we remain separated?"

"Let us say nine days," answered Turpin—"that's the time given for the endurance of a wonder; by then, very likely, the officers will have abated their vigilance; at any rate, it would be safe to meet then, and our future proceedings would be decided upon."

All this while Maud remained perfectly silent, listening attentively to all that was said, and gazing alternately into the countenances of the highwaymen as well as the obscurity of the place would permit.

Now, however, with considerable timidity she spoke.

"If you would take a suggestion from me," she said—"if you would listen to what I have to propose——"

All were silent.

"It is," she said, still more hesitatingly, "that you all endeavour to leave England. In another land you would be in safety."

"It is worth consideration," replied Dick; "but at present it is impracticable."

"Indeed!" said Maud, with a deeply-disappointed air. "Why impracticable?"

"Are you so selfish as to forget the danger in which Tom Davis and Ellen are now in? In their disappointment, who can say what the officers may do? I cannot think of leaving them to their fate. We must ascertain their condition, and do what we can to assist them."

This proposal met with universal assent.

"It would be base indeed," said Tom King, "to abandon them after having done so much for us."

"I did not think of their danger," said Maud—"it did not occur to me they would be in any. Do not imagine," she continued, earnestly, "that I would wish you to forsake such true and tried friends."

"Right," said Dick—"quite right! And now, my friends, are we all agreed? If so, the sooner we separate the better."

"Quite agreed," murmured the other three; for they were unable to think of any further arrangements.

Still they lingered for several moments.

After being for so long in company, the idea of parting was a most unpleasant one.

"As I was the first to speak," said Tom King, "let me be the first to go through the disagreeable ceremony. Farewell!"

"Farewell!" returned the others. "Don't forget the time and place of meeting."

"Depend upon it," said Tom King, "I shall not. If I am alive and uncaptured, you will see me there."

Taking his horse by the bridle, he walked slowly off among the trees.

The others gazed after him until he vanished from their sight.

Claude went next, taking an opposite direction.

Then Sixteen-String Jack started also by another route, and Dick Turpin and Maud were left alone.

From this it will be seen that the highwaymen would leave the plantation at four different points, which would make it all the more difficult for the police officers to observe them, or prevent their departure.

We must content ourselves with following their movements one at a time, and it seems only right to give the precedence to Dick Turpin himself.

He drew a long breath—which could almost be called a sigh—when the last of his comrades had left him; then

suddenly remembering the danger in which he stood, he turned to Maud.

"It will not be possible to mount at present, because of the low-lying branches of the trees, but I will lead Black Bess out by the shortest path I know of; then, once more in her life she must carry a double burden."

"As you like," returned Maud. "While I am with you I am content. I ask no more. The danger seems diminished more than one half when I share it with you."

Dick did not reply, out at once set forward, for he was anxious to get upon the back of Black Bess.

He regarded her arching neck and proud, impatient step with feelings of the greatest admiration.

"She will carry us bravely!" he ejaculated, in a triumphant voice. "When once in the saddle I shall not fear all the officers in the kingdom."

He pushed on through the trees as quickly as the nature of the ground would permit, until, at length, by the thinness of the vegetation, he was warned that he was near the edge of the plantation.

"We cannot be too cautious," he said. "Remain here, Maud, and hold Black Bess by the bridle, so. That will do nicely. Now I will creep forward with what stealthfulness I am capable, and ascertain whether any officers are near. It may be that this wood is watched; at any rate, it is important that the point should be decided."

He waved his hand while he spoke, and glided swiftly and noiselessly over the soft turf beneath the trees.

CHAPTER OM.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD MAKE A HALT AT THE WOOD PIGEON INN.

THEY were anxious moments for Maud that elapsed while Dick was absent on this, as it seemed to her, most perilous errand.

Glad enough was she when she caught the sound of his returning footstep and perceived his form.

"All is well, Maud," he said. "I have looked around cautiously and can see no signs of the officers. Come, I think we may venture to mount now."

So saying, he vaulted into the saddle, and, stooping down, lifted Maud on to the back of Black Bess in front of him.

"Gently," he cried—"gently—gently, Bess!"

It was difficult, however, to curb the impatience of Black Bess at this time—she was full of fire and spirit.

With cautious steps, however, the wood was left, and the open country gained.

Firmly convinced now that all was well, and knowing that he was out of danger, Dick uttered a faint cheer.

No sooner did the sound reach the ears of Black Bess than she gave a bound forward that almost unseated Maud.

Then, at a long, swinging gallop, she took her course across the open country.

Soon the red tint in the sky, proceeding from the blazing inn, disappeared from view.

Still Dick did not offer to check the speed of Black Bess, though, by keeping the reins firmly in his hand, he prevented her from increasing it.

In this manner, they continued to gallop over the country until a tolerably wide cross-road was reached.

From its appearance, it did not seem as though it was much frequented, for in some places it was thickly overgrown with grass.

Believing himself perfectly safe and free from pursuit, Dick diminished his mare's speed to a walk.

He had long ago learned the necessity of restraining her, so that when the moment of danger came she would be able to put forth all her energies.

Taking advantage of this opportunity for conversation, Maud asked Dick what his intentions were.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I scarcely know. I have not made up my mind, but shall be guided by the chapter of events."

"But will it not be better to seek out some place of refuge?"

"It would be better if some place could be found where we could remain in quiet; the difficulty is the discovery of it."

Maud sighed.

"You are weary, no doubt," cried Turpin, overhearing it, "and, to speak the truth, so am I. I should be glad enough of a few days' quiet and peacefulness with you. Let us hope we may meet with such a place ere long."

Maud uttered the same hope with great fervency.

The silence that prevailed around them, and the utter solitude in which they seemed to be, gave them an assurance of safety which was perhaps more imaginary than real.

But the night was fast wearing away.

In the east, indications of the coming day could plainly be perceived, and before long daylight would be shed around them.

Dick still maintained his course along the cross-country road, for it continued to present the same signs of only being slightly used.

This, then, of all others, was the route for him to take.

He was especially desirous to avoid meeting with anyone, since a horse carrying a double burden could not fail to attract universal notice.

All at once, however, upon turning round a bend in the road, Dick came in sight of a small roadside public-house.

A little further on he could see where two other roads branched off, one running at right angles to the direction he was taking.

Now he paused altogether, and both Maud and himself looked with considerable curiosity and interest at the old-fashioned building before them.

In the faint, grey morning light it looked particularly pleasing, and around it and in its whole appearance there was an air of tranquillity and peace that especially recommended it to the fugitives.

At last, in a faint voice, Maud ventured to speak.

"Surely," she said, "in this place we shall find the refuge on which you spoke. We are far away from Ealing, and who is there that could trace us here, and in so lonely and retired a spot?"

"No one, I should think," returned Dick, musingly, for even he felt the charm of this delightful spot.

"Well, then, let us stay now—I am fatigued, and should be glad to rest."

"We will, Maud, for although we have travelled thus far unseen, we cannot hope to go much further by broad daylight without meeting or overtaking somebody. Yes—yes, we will stay here."

He walked Black Bess slowly towards the inn as he spoke, and on drawing close enough to make out what was written on the swinging signboard, he saw that the house was called the Wood Pigeon, and was kept by Stephen Marshall.

"How strange!" he ejaculated, as his eye fell upon the name. "We have only just escaped from Marshall, and here's Marshall again."

"But not the same."

"No, surely not the same," returned Dick; "but the coincidence is singular."

He felt half inclined to turn back even then, for he had grown to dislike the name.

But it was a common one, and it was scarcely likely that the keeper of this little roadside inn could be known to or by the chief police officer.

While thus engaged in thought, the front door of the inn was opened, and a burly, good-tempered-looking man made his appearance on the threshold.

"Morning," he said—"mornin', sir. Would you like to stay here for a time—I have every accommodation?"

"I think so," said Dick, "for we have come some distance, and are weary."

"Then let me recommend you to stay here, for it is more than six miles to the next inn, where, although I say it, you will find the accommodation very inferior to what you will have here."

While speaking, the landlord, reading assent in the eyes of the travellers, came forward and assisted Maud to alight.

Dick sprang nimbly to the ground.

You have a capital nag there, sir," said the landlord, looking at Black Bess with admiring eyes.

"Yes, very fair," said Dick, hastily. "Is the ostler about?"

"He is very likely not awake yet," said the landlord. "If you don't mind, I will take the lady into the house,

and in the meanwhile you can go round to the stable; you will find him somewhere about; I will be with you in a minute or so."

"All right," said Dick, and, taking Black Bess by the bridle, he led her off in the direction that had been pointed out to him.

After much shouting and pulling at the handle of a cracked bell, he managed to arouse the attention of the ostler, who, by his appearance, had evidently been sleeping on the straw.

It was a rare thing for anyone to bring a horse to be put up at the Wood Pigeon, and so this lad was prepared to treat Dick with all imaginable deference.

The gift of half a crown, too, made a wonderful impression upon him.

He felt convinced that Dick must be a nobleman at the very least.

Before he had finished giving his instructions about Black Bess, and before she had been thoroughly rubbed down, the landlord appeared.

"I think I will stay here all day," Dick said.

"Very good, sir; your good lady does seem tired, and I am sure you will have no fault to find with the accommodation; all that we have is of the very best quality."

Having seen to Black Bess, Dick returned with the landlord across the yard.

Entering the inn, the landlord led him to the room in which Maud was seated.

But before he could accost her the profound stillness which prevailed at that early morning hour was broken in upon by the hasty tramping of horses' feet and the rattle of rapidly-revolving wheels.

Dick reached the little projecting window at one side.

Scarcely had he done so than a post-chaise, drawn by four horses, drew up in front of the inn, with a suddenness that seemed as though it would overturn it.

The horses looked excessively fatigued, and their flanks were dripping with perspiration.

The postilion, too, took off his cap and wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his coat, while he vociferated loudly for the ostler.

The landlord was in a state of great confusion immediately.

Never before in all his long residence at the Wood Pigeon had he known a post-chaise to pass the house, let alone stop at his door.

In the midst of his confusion, he recollected his own duty, and so hastened to the front of the inn.

By the time he reached it, the door of the post-chaise was opened from within, and a young man of strikingly handsome appearance alighted.

Holding up his hands, he next assisted a lady to alight.

She was richly attired, and seemed to be in an early stage of girlhood.

Great traces of agitation could be seen upon her countenance, of which, however, Maud and Dick obtained only a momentary glimpse, for the young man half-led, half-carried her into the inn.

He spoke loudly, so that Dick could not avoid hearing what he said, though, to speak truth, the highwayman was so much interested with this young couple, and had so grown to consider it was necessary for him to make himself acquainted with all things that came under his notice, that he would without scruple have listened intently at the door.

At present there was no necessity for this course.

"A bottle of your best wine, landlord—and quickly!" he cried, in rich, full tones, "and a little cake, or something of that kind—whatever you can get most quickly!"

Then, by the sound of steps without, Dick could tell that the young man had led his companion into a room on the opposite side of the passage, which ran completely from the front to the back of the inn.

"A nuptial elopement," said Dick, to Maud, with a smile—"a runaway match, or something of that kind. Well, if they are fond of each other they ought to be happy, and I consider no one should interfere."

In the meanwhile, the postilion was busily engaged in rubbing down his horses, and supplying them with hay and water.

"We shan't stay many minutes," Dick heard him say, in a confidential voice, to the ostler. "The fact is, that

girl's father is close behind us in pursuit. We should not have stopped here," he added, "only the young lady was near to fainting from fatigue."

CHAPTER CML

DICK TURPIN FINDS DANGER EVEN IN THE WOOD PIGEON INN.

A FEW minutes elapsed, and the postilion, having finished attending to the horses, withdrew himself into the interior of the inn in order to refresh his inner man.

While he was thus engaged, a party, consisting of four mounted men, suddenly appeared in front of the inn.

At first it looked like a mystery for them to appear so suddenly and silently.

But the fact is they had made their way along the grass-grown country road, and consequently the hoofs of the horses had not made sufficient noise to attract notice.

No sooner did the first horseman catch sight of the post-chaise than he uttered an indignant cry, and flung himself off his horse in what appeared to be a very dangerous manner.

He was a stout, well-dressed, stern-looking man, apparently about forty years of age—perhaps he was younger.

A piercing shriek coming from the room in which the young couple were seated was next heard, and testified that she had witnessed this fresh arrival.

The other three horsemen appeared to be the servants of the stern-looking man, who, beyond a doubt, was the young girl's father.

With the same reckless precipitation which had characterised his descent from his horse, he dashed into the inn, and broke open the door communicating with the apartment in which his daughter sat.

Shouting aloud, the stern-looking man cried:

"Draw, wretch!—villain!—scoundrel, that you are!—draw, I say, and defend yourself, or I will cut you down as you stand!"

"No, no, father!" cried the young girl. "Spare him—spare him! Your resentment now comes too late—he is my husband."

A fearful oath escaped the father's lips.

Then came a stifled cry, followed quickly by a dull sound.

Dick could tell, as well as if he had been there to see, that the angry father had spurned his daughter from him, and that she had fallen insensible to the floor.

At present, however, he could not see any reason to interfere; yet he drew his sword, and crept closer to the door of the room.

The young man uttered an angry shout when he witnessed this cruel act on the part of the bride's father.

Under the impulse of that anger, he must have drawn his sword, for the clash of steel was heard.

Directly afterwards the door of Dick's room was thrown open, and the landlord, as white as a ghost, and trembling from head to foot, made his appearance.

"Oh, sir—sir," he said, "you wear a sword! Put a stop to that dreadful conflict in the other room! I shall have murder done in my house, and then I am a ruined man!"

Dick only needed some excuse for interference, and, unheeding a remonstrance from Maud, he hurriedly left the room.

But the three servants who had arrived with the stranger guarded the door of the room.

Dick did not hesitate in making the attempt to force his way past them.

Before, however, he had time to accomplish his purpose, he saw the young man's sword suddenly struck aside by that of his more skillful opponent.

With his face more like a demon's than a man's, the angry father shortened his arm and gave a sudden and fearful lunge.

The young man's weapon was not in readiness to parry the blow.

The point of the glittering rapier entered his left breast, and such was the violence of the blow that the progress of the weapon was not stopped until the hilt struck audibly against his breast.

Quick as thought, the weapon was withdrawn, and again passed through the young man's body, who now

staggered backwards, dropped his sword, clasped his hands over his wound, made an effort to stand, and then fell lifeless to the floor.

"At last, villain!" said the stranger, flinging down his blood-stained sword.

Then, pointing to his daughter, and addressing his attendants, he said:

"Quick! Raise her and carry her away—the sooner the better!"

At the first touch of these men, however, the young girl recovered her consciousness.

She sprang to her feet with a wild, confused look in her eyes; then her glance fell upon the form of her newly-made husband, lying still in death upon the floor, with the blood yet welling from his wounds.

The cry that then escaped her lips would surely have pierced a heart of stone.

Releasing herself suddenly from the grasp of the servants, she sprang forward, and, before she could be prevented, flung herself at full length upon the young man's body.

Her tears and cries were then something fearful to witness.

She tried a dozen different methods of recalling the beloved one to life, but, failing in them all, she started up again with a wild, hysterical cry, that ended in a deal of loud, prolonged, unintermittent laughter.

All who heard it were dismayed.

The father uttered a groan of anguish.

There could be no mistaking that fearful laugh or the strange glitter of the eyes—both proclaimed insanity.

"Seize her!" cried the young girl's father, addressing his servants—"seize her, or she will do herself a mischief! Make her secure and carry her to the post-chaise!"

The poor girl echoed the last words, and then again broke out into a peal of frenzied laughter.

The servants proceeded to carry out the instructions given them, but as soon as they touched the bride she uttered shriek upon shriek, calling all the while upon her husband to protect and save her, who, alas! no longer heard that voice which had ever been like music in his ears.

Without more force than was absolutely required, the young girl was carried out of the inn and placed in the post-chaise.

Her father regarded her with a stern, un pitying look. One would have thought that this terrible event would have caused him to relent and to repent, but so far from it, his anger was increased.

The landlord, whose dismay it is impossible to describe, hastened after him, and seized him by the coat.

"Sir—sir," he cried, "I am a ruined man—yes, a ruined man! And it is you who have wrought the evil! Murder is in my house! What is to be done?"

The stranger shook him off roughly.

"Do what you like," he said—"I care not. It is no business of mine."

He was about to step into the post-chaise, but Dick Turpin advanced.

What he would have said or done under the circumstances is hard to say, for just at that moment the landlord cried:

"If my brother was only here now I should be in a different position. He is the chief police officer in London, and will be here to-day. I can describe you to him. You shall, at any rate, reap the consequences of this deed!"

These words made Dick stagger back, and well they might.

His own safety rose instantly paramount to every other consideration.

Could it really be possible that he had journeyed so far, and had in the end taken up his quarters in a place where Jack Marshall would be most likely to find him?

The moment of irresolution and confusion sufficed to allow the stranger to escape.

One of his own servants sprang upon the back of one of the horses belonging to the post-chaise, and urged the whole onward at full gallop.

The others followed on the steeds upon which they had arrived.

In less than a couple of moments the whole party was out of sight, leaving the landlord dumbfounded, per-



[DICK TURPIN ASTONISHES THE LANDLORD OF THE WOOD PIGEON INN]

plexed, confused, scarcely able to believe what had just taken place.

The postboy, too, witnessed with rage and fear the violent seizure of his vehicle. But one of the horses belonging to the stranger still remained, so, with a fierce shout, he sprang on to his back, and galloped off in pursuit.

"Did you not say that your brother is the chief police officer in London?"

"Yes—to be sure he is, and how thankful I am I have some one so powerful to aid me. Let me see? Why, is it possible? He promised, if he possibly could, to call upon me here to-day. Perhaps I may see him in the course of a few moments."

During the occurrence of these last events, Maud had left the inn and made her way to Turpin's side.

This last speech of the landlord, however, forced a No. 185.—BLACK BESS.

scream of dismay from her lips, which had the immediate effect of attracting general attention towards her.

The result might have been awkward, but just then a diversion happened which told greatly in her favour.

The landlady had not risen when the post-chaise arrived—in fact, she did not make her appearance downstairs until after the newly-made bride was carried off by her father.

The first thing she did was to rush into the room where the encounter had taken place, and, having done so, her eyes were horrified by the frightful spectacle presented to them.

The young man was lying there cold and immovable in death, just in the same position as he had fallen, while the blood that had flowed from his wounds formed quite a pool around him.

Upon seeing this, the landlady threw up her arms and

gurgled hysterically, and then fell down in a swoon, to all outward appearances as lifeless as the young stranger.

It was that which took place just after Maud had screamed, and the landlord, being made acquainted with it, rushed into the inn.

"Hush—hush!" said Dick, speaking to her as reassuringly as he could—"don't be alarmed! We know our danger in good time, and all will be well. Do you hear—do you understand? I tell you to be calm."

"Yes—yes."

"We are in no danger yet—most certainly in no danger. And now pay particular attention to my instructions."

She looked up into his face attentively.

"It will never do for us to remain here any longer," he continued, speaking in a hurried tone of voice; "we cannot tell one moment from another when Jack Marshall and his officers will arrive. I am resolved to depart at once. I will take advantage of this confusion that is reigning around, and hasten to the stables. In the meanwhile, you enter the inn and, without attracting any more notice than you can help, leave it by the back door; you will see me there, and after that Black Bess will do the rest."

Hastily as these instructions were given her, and great as was the confusion of her mind, Maud perfectly understood them.

Dick left her, hastily darting round the corner of the inn at full speed, for just then no one happened to be about.

He had no difficulty in entering the stables.

Black Bess was there, and according to his request all her trappings had been hung up on the stall in which she stood.

With nimble fingers he placed them upon her back, and he had her already for the road in a space of time so short that it would have made the ostler of the Wood Pigeon ready to die of vexation.

Rapid as all his movements had been, yet by the time he gained the door of the stable Maud had entered the yard.

She hastened towards him, and Dick without more ado mounted.

Swinging her into the saddle before him in the same way as before, he rode with rather dangerous swiftness to the front of the inn.

CHAPTER CML.

DICK TURPIN LEAVES THE WOOD PIGEON INN, AND HAS AN ADVENTURE ON THE ROAD.

EITHER the ostler had been observing Dick's motions, or else the clatter of Black Bess's hoofs had attracted attention, for the landlord and all his household hastily made their appearance at the front door.

"Hi, hi!—stop!" he roared—"stop—stop! What does it all mean? Is everybody mad, or am I?"

The landlord might well ask this question, for the events that had so recently occurred in such rapid succession were quite calculated to disturb the equilibrium of one who had led such an even life as himself.

Dick made no reply, but he slackened his mare's speed somewhat.

Then, plunging his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a guinea.

"Here," he said, as he threw it among the group, "that will do for the reckoning."

No sooner had the words passed his lips than he again gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

As he did so, a loud, peculiar shout from the rear became audible, and he turned quickly to ascertain the cause.

To his extreme annoyance, for he hoped to leave the inn unseen, he perceived a throng of police officers approaching.

They were at too great a distance for their countenances to be distinguished, yet Dick fancied, from the general appearance of the one who rode a little in advance of the rest, that he was no other than his pertinacious foe, Jack Marshall.

Black Bess had had but a brief rest, yet that had sufficed to recruit her energies wonderfully.

Besides, although they had travelled so many miles, Dick had carefully husbanded her strength.

He had now the best of all reasons for congratulating himself upon having adopted so prudent a course.

He did not hesitate to urge her to put forth her utmost powers of speed.

As if by magic, then, the troop of police officers were left behind.

They tried indeed to keep up a pursuit, but found it impossible—their horses were thoroughly exhausted.

Dick continued his headlong course until he felt that he had gone far enough to be perfectly secure from all danger of pursuit.

Then, by slow degrees, he tightened the rein.

Maud was anxious and alarmed.

She looked apprehensively behind her, being scarcely able to believe that they were out of danger.

"I am vexed," Dick said, "and for more reasons than one. I fully intended that you should have plenty of rest before we journeyed further; as it is, we are in the open daylight without knowing where to look for shelter."

"Don't let that trouble you," said Maud—"it is not worth your consideration. You should remember your own life is at stake, and that you should do everything in your power to preserve it."

"Well, Maud, we will do our best. I should like to get some distance further from the officers than I am now; I am sorry, too, to put Black Bess to another gallop, yet it must be done."

He suited the action to the word, and for some time not another word was exchanged—in fact, it was not until the sun had attained a considerable altitude, and until the business of the day had fairly commenced, that Dick again drew rein.

He then found himself in a most beautiful and picturesque portion of the country—a place in which he would have been glad enough to linger for a time.

Not even the least observant person could have looked around without perceiving the many rare natural beauties of the place.

In the bright morning sunlight, too, all objects had a particularly fresh and pleasant appearance.

Indeed, it was scarcely possible to look upon that scene under a more favourable aspect.

Far away before them the road could be traced, stretching itself like a broad strip of white ribbon, and Dick's keen eye presently descried, at a great distance, the form of a mounted man, who was riding towards them.

Evidently the sight reminded him of something, for he brought Black Bess completely to a halt, and plunged his hands in quick succession into his different pockets.

"Mat'd," he said, at last, in answer to the inquiring look she gave while he was thus engaged, "it is as I fear."

"What?" she asked, with an expression of alarm.

"I have no money. That was the last guinea I flung to the landlord as he was standing at his door. We cannot go on thus; we must have money before we can proceed further."

"But," asked Maud, trembling with dread, "tell me where you can obtain it?"

Dick raised his arm and pointed over the low hedge-rows.

"Do you see?" he asked.

The figure of the horseman was now much more distinctly visible than it had been before, for the simple reason that he had come much closer.

"I see that horseman," said Maud, more agitated than before; "but surely you do not mean—"

"Yes, Maud, I do. The only means by which I can obtain money is by taking it on the road. I will commit an act of violence, and, from the appearance of the stranger, I should fancy that the loss of such a trifle as I shall take from him will not inconvenience him much."

"But you forget,"

"Forget what?"

"Your own danger."

Dick laughed lightly.

"But consider," persisted Mat'd, with great earnestness—"consider that the officers are close behind you, and that it is broad daylight. This act cannot fail to bring the officers upon your track."

"They will trace me easily enough as it is," was Turpin's rejoinder. "No—no, Maud, I see no reason to hold back; fortune has thrown this chance into my way, and I should be unwise in the extreme not to avail myself of it."

"For once," said Maud—"only for once let me request you to allow him to pass unmolested."

"Do not entreat that favour," replied Dick, "for it is one I cannot grant, though it pains me to refuse you. There's little or no danger, and, as I said before, money is more necessary to our safety than anything else."

Maud burst into tears, but Dick affected to take no notice of her emotion.

"Come, dear Maud," he said, "let me assist you to the ground. There, that will do nicely. Do not be in the least frightened. Sit down on that little grassy embankment, and remain there; in a few minutes I shall return. Do not be afraid; the adventure is a trifling one after all."

These words, however, did not reassure Maud in the least, for she wept bitterly.

She had learned from experience, however, that when Dick had once made up his mind to pursue any particular course it was quite vain to attempt to dissuade him from it.

At such times there was only one thing she could do, and that was to submit.

This course she adopted on the present occasion, but dreading the encounter that was about to ensue, she shut out the sight of everything around her by clasping her hands closely over her face.

In the meanwhile, with the easiest air imaginable, Dick Turpin trotted forward, and to have glanced at him, so one in the world would have believed that his position was really so perilous as it was.

But this little adventure, coming upon him so unexpectedly, seemed to have quite a reviving effect upon his spirits—indeed, as he walked Black Bess slowly forwards he lightly hummed a tune.

When hastily leaving the Three Spiders, he had only just time to buckle on a sword.

He was altogether unprovided with firearms or ammunition.

To all appearances, however, this circumstance did not trouble him in the least.

The stranger came on at rather a smart trot, and every step his horse took produced a jingling sound.

He was wrapped in a cloak, for the morning air was chill; but every now and then the wind would blow it partially aside and disclose his apparel, which was that of an officer of the guards in an undress uniform.

Apparently he took but little notice of Dick as he walked Black Bess deliberately along the road.

Nor did Dick seem particularly attentive, although his eyes were keenly fixed upon every movement the stranger made.

At length, when close enough for his purpose, Dick stopped Black Bess just in the centre of the road, and the stranger, perceiving it, had to check his steed somewhat abruptly to prevent a collision.

Dick took advantage of this event by taking off his hat and making a low bow.

The officer, who was evidently also a gentleman, with great politeness and grace returned the salutation.

He would have passed on, though, had not Dick's voice arrested his progress.

"One moment, sir," he said. "Excuse me if I interrupt you on your journey—one moment, if you please."

The officer looked at Dick closely, thinking perhaps that he might be some forgotten acquaintance.

Failing to recognise him, however, he said:

"I am at your commands, sir. What is your pleasure?"

"I can scarcely say," said Dick, with a laugh, "but just at the present moment I happen to be in a little difficulty, and I am sure you will rejoice when I tell you that, above all others, you are the very man who will get me out of it."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, with some show of surprise and interest, for Dick's manner of accosting him was such that he never for one moment guessed at his intention.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURE WITH THE OFFICER.

"INDEED and in fact," returned Dick, very gravely.

"I am at a loss to understand you," ejaculated the stranger

"No doubt you are," said Dick; "but I shall quickly make myself clear. It would be a shame to keep you in a state of ignorance upon such a point. The fact is, the difficulty I am in is the want of money."

The stranger repeated the words half unconsciously, and backed his horse several paces.

"Yes," said Dick, speaking now in a bolder and more determined tone of voice, "my last guinea is gone, and I look to you, sir, to replenish my purse."

"Well, d—n your impudence!" said the stranger.

"Cursè me if ever I heard of such a thing in my life! Be off with you!"

"Stay!" cried Dick, in a loud voice, as by one bound he caused Black Bess to plant herself exactly in front of the officer's steed—"stay! I intend to stand no nonsense! At the same time, I would gladly avoid violence; therefore, let me advise you to hand over your money quietly, without making the least fuss—indeed, it would not be becoming of you as a gentleman to do so."

"Wouldn't it? Then I beg leave to differ with you upon that point—to differ with you entirely! And now I tell you plainly, Mr. Highwayman, that no money of mine shall you have!"

"You will alter your mind," said Dick—"I feel sure you will alter your mind! How very unwise it would be of you to risk your valuable life for a trifling sum of money!"

"Well, I must say you are the coolest customer that ever I met with or heard of in the whole course of my life," said the stranger, forced against his will into admiration. "Do you always take these matters in so equable a manner?"

"Ahem!" said Dick, "it depends. But when I am with a gentleman like yourself, I endeavour to treat him as a gentleman."

The stranger laughed at this compliment.

"I don't intend to risk my life for what money I have about me," he said, "because it is a mere trifle. Still less, however, do I feel inclined to give it up without any show of resistance. You shall have my purse upon one condition."

"Name it."

"It is, then, that you draw your sword, alight, and cross blades with me, just in a friendly way. And if you can succeed in giving me three distinct hits before I have touched you twice, the purse is yours; on the other hand, if you fail, I retain my money."

"Agreed!" said Dick, as he sprang lightly from the saddle. "Nothing could be more congenial to my temper!"

"Nor to mine," said the stranger, "for I have a chance of keeping what I have, with the additional satisfaction that no one can taunt me with having tamely submitted to being robbed on the highway."

The stranger alighted also, and secured his horse to the branch of a tree.

Then, drawing a tolerably well-filled purse from his pocket, he threw it into the middle of the road.

"There," he said, "there's the money. The victor takes it!"

With the same nimbleness that had characterised all his movements, the stranger now pulled off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves, disclosing an arm that, though slender, was evidently very muscular.

But Dick did not think it worth while to disapparel himself.

Perceiving that he advanced with his coat on, the stranger said:

"I don't want to take you at an unfair advantage—it is not in my nature to do so. I believe that without vanity I can say I am a good swordsman. I should like you to stand on equal ground with myself. Most certainly your coat will impede your movements."

"No matter," said Dick, in the same easy, careless manner in which he had all along spoken. "I am used to fighting with my coat on; and besides, we shall save time."

The stranger did not say another word, but immediately crossed his blade over Dick's.

His attitude and the manner in which he fixed his eyes made the highwayman aware that he was pitted against an antagonist of no ordinary description.

The next moment this singular conflict began.

The blades of the swords rattled together as the two

combatants held themselves prepared for attack or defence.

The stranger was the first to make a thrust, and it was given so suddenly—so straightforwardly—that it seemed as though it must inevitably reach home.

But Dick parried it at once, then, quick as lightning changing the direction of his sword, struck the officer lightly on the shoulder.

"One!" he said, with a laugh.

The officer's face flushed, and it was perfectly certain that he had made up his mind he should obtain an easy victory over the highwayman, and the thrust that had been parried so skilfully was his favourite means of attack, and never before had he known it to fail him.

Yet, considering all things, he preserved his calmness admirably, and he again crossed his sword over that of Dick Turpin.

The stranger now waited to be attacked, and Dick did not leave him long in suspense.

Watching his opportunity, he suddenly lunged forward, and struck his adversary on the arm just above the elbow; at the same time, he felt a slight touch himself.

"Two and one!" he said. "Then the next stroke must decide it."

Some traces of excitement now began to manifest themselves in the stranger's manner.

Never before had he encountered an opponent so skilful as Dick Turpin.

He felt that his credit as a swordsman was now at stake, and this feeling went very far indeed towards unnerving him.

As for Dick himself, he was to all outward appearances as indifferent as ever; but that might have arisen from his consciousness of his own superior powers as a swordsman.

Again the weapons clanged together.

Rapid thrusts were interchanged and parried.

Then, by mutual consent, they paused.

At this moment a shriek came upon their ears.

It issued from Maud's lips.

From the distance she had witnessed this conflict, and, of course, she was unable to tell that it was one of a friendly character.

"Thinking only of Dick's danger, she came hurrying on.

"That is some one with you?" said the stranger, interrogatively.

"It is," said Dick, "and this must be settled before she comes up. Now, then, to it again!"

There was more of earnestness in Dick's manner than there had been hitherto, and the stranger felt it.

Scarcely had the swords been crossed than Dick, with a rapid movement, disengaged his own sword, and tapped the officer lightly on the breast.

"Three!" he said. "Just in time!"

With another cry, Maud bounded forward, and reached his side.

She clasped her arms around him, and could scarcely believe at first that he was unhurt and safe.

"All's well, Maud," he said—"all's well! This gentleman and myself have had a friendly bout together—nothing more."

With an evident sense of chagrin the stranger sheathed his sword, drew down his shirt-sleeves, and resumed his coat; and Dick sheathed his own weapon likewise, and, with a careless, almost indifferent, step, walked to the spot where the purse was lying, and picked it up.

"Farewell," he said, perceiving that the stranger had already gained the saddle, and was about to gallop off—"farewell, sir! And should you ever hear Dick Turpin's name mentioned, you at least will be able to bear testimony that he did not behave himself like a common footpad!"

The officer bestowed a stare of intense and undisguised astonishment upon Dick, then, muttering:

"I might have guessed it," plucked his spurs into his horse's flanks and galloped away, for this disclosure of his adversary's name did not in the least degree reconcile him to his defeat.

"Are you sure you are unhurt," said Maud—"are you quite certain of it?"

"Quite; and was in no danger except from you. Yes, and that shriek of yours come upon my ears at a critical moment the consequences would have been serious; but

no matter, I have gained my end; here is a purse, and if the stranger is satisfied I am."

He consigned it to his pocket as he spoke.

Then, once more both resumed their places upon the back of Black Bess.

"I am not afraid that he will betray me," Dick said, in answer to a question from Maud, "nor do I think he would give the officers any information. However, I feel that to journey any further along this road by daylight would be unwise, so at this second turning we come to we will leave it."

"Why not the first?"

"Simply because the officers might take it into their heads to ride down it; it would be much safer to ride on to the second."

Maud felt that this reason was a good one, and said no more.

Dick again put Black Bess to the gallop, as he was anxious to leave the road he was now on, from the single fact that a long, uninterrupted view could be obtained of it.

He did not reach a second turning, however, until he had gone considerably more than a mile.

At length he stopped suddenly.

"There's a lane," he said; "but we have passed it; the entrance is so dark and narrow that I could scarcely make out what it was at first."

Maud looked around her in some surprise, for although she had been on the look-out she had seen nothing of the lane Dick spoke of.

Black Bess's head was now turned round, and after they had retraced their steps for a short distance they found themselves opposite to the entrance of one of those narrow, winding, leafy lanes that are to be found in almost every part of England.

CHAPTER CMIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS WITH ANOTHER SINGULAR ADVENTURE.

ON either side trees had been planted very closely together, and they were of great antiquity, as was evidenced by the immense thickness of their trunks.

These trees were indeed so closely in contact that it would have been hard to squeeze any bulky object between them, and their branches shot out in such profusion above that they completely covered the lane, forming a kind of arched canopy to it.

Dick without hesitation made his way along it, and as soon as ever they had got beneath the shadow of the old trees, such an air of peacefulness and quiet came over all things that they felt themselves to be in perfect safety.

"We are not likely to meet with anyone here, Maud," said Dick, "so we can journey on without much fear. Still you are weary, and should any shelter present itself, rely upon it I shall not hesitate to avail myself of it."

"If it will be safe to do so," said Maud.

"Oh, it will be safe enough, never fear; leave all consideration of danger to me."

So great was the silence around, and such an impression did it produce upon Dick, that he could not prevail upon himself to disturb it.

The fact was he was terribly fatigued, though his constitution was so strong that he was only made sensible of it by a longing desire for repose.

It was therefore at a pace scarcely exceeding a walk that he allowed Black Bess to make her way along this lane.

Another reason which induced him to adopt this course was out of consideration for his steed.

Black Bess had been upon her legs for many hours, and had travelled many miles.

Comparatively speaking, it was rest for Dick to sit in the saddle while his mare was going so gently.

But although his bodily powers enjoyed this repose his mental ones did not.

He was very uneasy, not only on account of his comrades, but particularly on behalf of Tom Davis and Ellen, who he feared would find themselves in a very difficult, unpleasant position.

Maud glanced up at his face and saw by the expression of it that something was troubling him.

In a moment she asked what it was.

"I will tell you," he said. "It is as you may say a

matter of no very great moment, yet for the life of me I can't think it so. It concerns a promise that I made—a promise that I cannot see reasonable hopes of being able to perform."

"What promise was it?" asked Maud, wonderingly.

"The one I made to Mr. Bradbury, the Governor of Newgate. I told him that if he went within a week to Hampstead Heath he would find buried at the foot of a certain tree that I described to him, some recompense for what he did on my behalf."

"And is it not there?"

"No, certainly not; I only represented to him that there was, thinking I should have no difficulty whatever in riding there and concealing such a sum as I considered an adequate reward for all that he had done; but now how am I to hope to achieve it?"

Maud shook her head.

"I am afraid," she said, "that the Governor will meet with a disappointment."

"I should be vexed for such a thing as that to occur," said Dick. "I place great value on a promise, and I should not like the Governor of Newgate or anyone else to be able to say that Dick Turpin had gone from his word. No—no, Maud, that would never do; somehow or other, and in spite of all risks, the money must be put there before the week has expired."

"But under present circumstances," said Maud, "is it not a total impossibility? You have no money except what you carry with you, and how could you possibly venture on to Hampstead Heath for the purpose of burying it?"

"The latter part would be easy enough," said Dick; "the worst of it is I have not enough; I should not like to insult the Governor by offering him such a trifling sum as this purse contains. I must set my wits to work, and doubtless ere long I shall see some means or other of fulfilling my project."

After speaking these words Dick relapsed into silence. He was turning the matter over in his mind in every possible way.

Thus plunged in deep thought he rode on, he scarcely knew for how long a period.

The progress Black Bess made was very slow, for she found she was allowed to go just at her own pace.

All at once both Maud and Dick were startled by an unexpected but by no means alarming sound, yet it was one that made Black Bess prick up her ears and project them forwards.

The sound was repeated.

"That's a laugh," said Dick, in some amazement. "Who can it be in such a lonely, out-of-the-way place as this, giving way to laughter?"

Maud clung to him full of terror.

"Be not alarmed," he said; "surely we ought not to be terrified at hearing the sound of laughter."

"But who is it?"

"That we shall know in a very short time," said Dick, "for the sound came from somewhere very close at hand. We will look first if possible without revealing ourselves, then we can perfectly satisfy ourselves that there is no danger."

Crooking close under the shadow of the trees, Dick made his way along the lane to a point where it turned off at rather a sharp angle.

Reaching this spot, he paused and reconnoitred.

At a little distance off he perceived a sight that was at once picturesque and amusing.

A little way further on the character of the lane changed—in fact, it seemed as though it emerged upon a wild kind of common or heath.

Near the edge of the lane Dick saw a cart piled up with a miscellaneous assemblage of articles, and a yellow caravan.

Heads on the ground were in all about half a dozen persons, nearly all of whom were laughing heartily.

Dick looked in order to ascertain the cause of their laughter and soon found it to be the antics of a boy certainly not more than seven or eight years of age, who was attempting some difficult feats of tumbling.

Maud looked upon this scene with great surprise and curiosity.

"They are strolling players," said Dick, in answer to an inquiring glance that she bent upon him. "Good, harmless people no doubt, who have sat down here to rest."

Certainly the utmost good feeling seemed to exist among the whole group; there was not one sorrowful, dejected-looking countenance.

"Shall we avoid them?" asked Maud.

"I think not," said Dick. "I feel sure that such wanderers as these would gladly extend a friendly hand to us. They are more comfortable than one would imagine at a first glance, and unless you have some strong objection I should recommend that we go to them and ask them for rest and shelter."

"If you think it would be safe to do so," said Maud, "I should be glad indeed, for I am utterly weary."

"So am I," said Dick, "so is Black Bess, and this sweet grass that grows hereabout will make for once an excellent substitute for a feed of corn."

Dick's resolution being thus taken he ventured to show himself.

Slightly increasing his speed, he rode towards the merry group.

The sound of a horse's hoofs attracted universal attention, and they all fixed their eyes curiously upon Maud and Dick.

The boy whose antics had amused the rest no sooner perceived the new-comers than he ran towards them, made a grotesque bow, then, turning a succession of somersaults along the road, stopped suddenly upon his feet.

He bowed again, and held out his hand to solicit a donation.

Dick stopped and threw him a piece of silver.

"Ask your friends," he said, "whether they will allow us to join them for a short time? We are hungry and weary?"

Astonished at the gift of so large a sum of money, the boy cut a fantastic caper and hurried off.

He quickly communicated his message.

In the meanwhile Dick continued to ride slowly towards them.

A man now rose from the grass on which he had been sitting, and advanced towards Dick half respectfully, half confidently.

"You are quite welcome to stop," he said, "and to share everything we have. You won't find us close hearted, though we are poor and cannot afford to be very generous."

"I will pay liberally for everything," said Dick. "Don't think I want to trespass upon you in that respect."

"Then you are heartily welcome," said the man, "and we will make you as comfortable as our rough means will permit."

Dick looked at this man with more than common interest.

In spite of the poor, ragged clothes he wore, there was an indefinable something in his manner that showed at once that he had occupied a tolerable position in life—indeed, his mode of speech at once displayed this fact.

Maud was assisted to alight.

Dick followed quickly, and removed the trappings from Black Bess with his own hands.

"I am known as Herr Smithini," said the man, addressing Maud, "and if you will come with me I will introduce you to my wife, who will do her best to make you comfortable."

The remainder of the troop looked somewhat surprised when Dick removed the bridle from Black Bess, thus allowing her perfect freedom; but then they were not aware that the highwayman could call his steed at any moment to his side by uttering that peculiar chirping signal whistle.

CHAPTER CMV.

DICK TURPIN BELIEVES THAT HE HAS FOUND A FIRM, TRUE FRIEND.

THE troop of strolling players, for such they were, consisted of Smithini, two other men, two females, and the boy.

The men, though clad in loose, ill-fitting garments, were evidently tumblers, as was shown by the flexibility of all their joints whenever they moved.

Without exception, they made Dick very welcome, viting him to a share of their provisions.

Dick consented willingly enough, and renewed his offers of reward.

These men were all to a certain extent outcasts from society, like himself, and therefore very likely to befriend him—at any rate, he resolved to run the risk of placing confidence in them, if only for Maud's sake.

"We make ourselves as happy as we can," said Smithini, when Dick alluded to the laughter which his presence had interrupted. "but I can assure you, sir, we have little cause for mirth at the present time, having met with a great misfortune."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"The loss of our best horse—one that we had taught, with what trouble and patience you could not comprehend, to perform many tricks. What caused the creature's death we cannot guess; it may have been cold, exposure—I know not what. Certain it is that the most attractive feature in our exhibition is gone."

"Then your entertainment is a circus?"

The man nodded.

"Yes," he said. "And here you see my company, or rather the remains of it," he added, rather sadly, "for there was a time when my position was very different from what it is now. It is useless to repine—we must do the best we can, and hope for better times."

Dick would very willingly have questioned this man respecting his past life; he felt quite sure that he should obtain from him many details of a strange and interesting nature.

But after the rude meal was partaken of, such a feeling of drowsiness and heaviness came over him as he had never before experienced.

He tried in vain to struggle with it.

"I know not whether it is your intention to stay here long," he said, rousing himself with some difficulty, "but if you would let me sleep somewhere until sunset I would take it as the greatest favour you can grant."

"It shall be so. We are tired, and our horses also. Make yourself content."

By the directions of the leader of the troop, some canvas was pulled out of the waggon and fixed upon poles, so that a rude kind of tent was formed.

Here Dick threw himself down, and quickly fell asleep.

Maud was in the yellow caravan, also wrapped in slumber, for she was quite worn out with the anxieties and fatigues of the last few days.

Before retiring to rest, however, Dick had entreated Smithini to give him immediate warning if he perceived the approach of any police officers.

Nothing but extreme physical exhaustion would have made it possible for Dick to sleep under such circumstances as these.

But he did sleep, and soundly.

When he at length opened his eyes, it seemed as though not more than a moment had elapsed since he had closed them.

Looking around, however, he saw that it was fast growing dark.

For some time he remained perfectly still.

He was thinking over his position, and endeavouring to decide what should be his next step.

Among these friendly strollers there was no doubt he would be able to find a refuge, and Maud as well.

But then he recollected the promise he had made to the Governor of Newgate.

By what means he could possibly obtain the sum of money needed, and bury it in time at the foot of the tree on Hampstead Heath, seemed an absolute mystery.

Suddenly, in the midst of his perplexities, he was struck by a bright thought.

He was all exultation in a moment.

Almost any other person, however, would have shrunk back in dismay at the bare idea of what Dick contemplated.

"Yes," he said to himself, "that's the course; it is simple and straightforward. I will go to Drury Lane; Matthew will willingly lend me the money I require; there will be no obstacle in that quarter, and, at the same time, I shall be able to learn intelligence of Tom Davis. Why, that alone would be worth the risk. Yes, my mind is made up, I'll go!"

This seemed, however, little short of madness; it was virtually courting danger for danger's sake.

Although he had arrived at this decision, Dick found many difficulties in the way of carrying it out.

First and foremost came Maud.

What was he to do with her in the meanwhile, for it was impossible for her to accompany him to the White Horse?

"I must speak to her," he said—"I must persuade her to let me go. These players will doubtless take her under their charge; she will be safe with them, and if they keep faith with me, why, this man shall be so well rewarded that he will step at once into his lost position. All my difficulties are clearing themselves away. Now my course is clear and straightforward I must follow it."

With these words, Dick rose and emerged from the tent.

Close at hand, he saw the figure of Smithini.

"You have slept long," he said—"you must have been fatigued."

"I was."

"Come this way, then. You see they have made a fire yonder; we will, if you like, have one more meal together, and then I suppose we must part."

"Yes—I suppose so; but before I leave I have an offer to make to you."

Just as he spoke these words, the fire was reached, round which the whole party had assembled.

Maud was there, and Dick hastened to place himself by her side.

The scene was one that recommended itself to Dick from its very novelty, and he heartily joined in good-fellowship with these strangers among whom he had been so suddenly cast.

When the meal was over, he led Maud away to a little distance to speak to her.

"Black Bess is safe, you say?"

"Yes—quite safe, or was, only a short time back."

Dick whistled, then waited a moment.

The quick beat of hoofs over the heath was heard, and the next moment Black Bess was by her master's side caressing him.

"Yes, all's well," he said. "And now, Maud, I have something to propose to you which will be for the good of all. It will entail some sacrifice on your part, but you must not hesitate to make it."

She looked at him strangely, wondering what would come next.

In a few words, then, he announced his decision.

Maud recoiled with horror at the bare idea.

It needed all Dick's rhetoric only to partially reassure her; but at length he succeeded.

He hit upon the right course for inducing her to consent to allow him to visit the White Horse.

It was by representing how selfish his conduct and hers would appear if they left Tom Davis and Ellen to their fate.

The consent of Smithini to the arrangement alone was wanting, and Dick now hastened to seek him out.

"I would rather not tell you who I am," he said, bluntly, as soon as they had met; "but, as you may guess, I am an offender against the laws. The officers of justice are in pursuit of me. They are no friends of yours unless I make a great mistake."

"They are certainly not friends," said Smithini, with some bitterness. "Often and often, by a needless interference, they have deprived me of much money."

"I don't doubt it; but to return to what I was saying. You were telling me that your position was once very different."

"It was," answered the man. "I had a large stud of horses, and the best troupe of equestrians and tumblers in the kingdom. Now you see to what I am reduced. I expect the next thing will be, we shall have to part with the waggon and tents for a subsistence, by picking up a few coppers by performing in the roadway."

"Not so," said Dick, laying his hand on his shoulder. "If you only consent to what I propose, you will have no need to take this gloomy view of things. I require a service at your hands; if you grant it, the recompense shall be such a reward as will enable you to resume your former position."

Smithini looked at Dick incredulously for a moment.

"You speak fair," he said, "and there is a truth in

flag in your voice; but such good fortune is hard to believe. If you are in earnest, however, give me your hand."

"I am in earnest," said Dick, as he complied with his demand.

Smithini grasped his hand warmly, and then, with great solemnity, said:

"If you make good your promise, I swear there is no service in the power of man to perform that I would not render you. Now, then, let me hear it."

Dick was more pleased than ever with this man's manner.

He told him that he should wish to leave Maud with him for a day or two, during which time he was to take the greatest care of her—to shield her from all danger, and if, on his return, he found her safe, his promise should be kept.

"It seems a trifling service to perform for so great a reward. I scarcely like to accept your terms."

"I like you none the worse for that," said Dick, "and, in proof of it, I will take you entirely into my confidence, for you don't look like the man to betray the trust placed in you by another."

CHAPTER CMVI.

DICK TURPIN ASSUMES HIS DISGUISE AND SETS OUT FOR LONDON.

A LOOK of surprise came over Smithini's face as Dick thus spoke.

"You can trust me," he said. "Never fear that I will betray you."

"I don't fear," said Dick, sinking his voice to a lower tone, and glancing cautiously around, so as to make sure they were out of hearing of everybody, "and for that reason I shall tell you, without reserve, who I am. You must have heard of me in some way or other. I am known by the name of Dick Turpin."

"The highwayman?"

"The same."

The stroller held out his hand.

"I have heard much concerning you," he said, "and what's more, I like what I have heard, and will do my best to befriend you—indeed, almost from the first I guessed at your identity, but I waited to see whether you would disclose yourself."

"I have done so," said Dick. "That is my wife that I wish to leave in your care. She is sought for by the officers, as well as myself, and therefore it is necessary that she should keep herself in strict concealment."

The man nodded.

"As for myself, business of an urgent and of a dangerous nature compels me to make my way to London."

Smithini gave a start of surprise.

"To London?" he replied.

Dick nodded.

"Let me advise you not to go."

"Why?"

"Because, if you do go, capture is certain."

Dick laughed his old, quiet laugh.

"You must leave me to take care of myself," he said, "and to act as I may judge best. I thank you for your caution, but it is needless."

"No offence, I hope?"

"None in the least, and now, since all this is arranged, I will seek my wife, and let her know the result of this interview."

"Very good. There is only one thing, and that you appear to have forgotten."

"What is it?"

"To make some arrangement as to meeting again."

"Can you not remain hereabout?"

"It would interfere seriously with my plans, were I to do so," said the man, after a pause, "though, of course, you can command me. For my own part, however, I think the safest and most prudent course would be to continue my movements just as though I had never seen you. Your wife will travel with us, and there will then be no ground for suspicion."

"You are quite right," said Dick. "Let it be so. Tell me to what place you thought of going next?"

"My next halt," said the stroller, "will be about a

dozen miles from here, a small town called S—field. I may stay there a day, perhaps only a few hours. I am not there when you arrive, push on to the next village. You will hear tidings of us all along on our route."

"It will be easy to trace you," said Dick, "and so I know quite sufficient."

With these words he turned away, and made Maud acquainted with the arrangements that had been agreed to by himself and Smithini.

To them she did not venture to offer any opposition. She knew how perfectly useless it would be to attempt to dissuade Dick from setting out upon this expedition, and she had sufficient good sense to know that the arrangement made was the very best possible under the circumstances.

Although matters had been settled so far, there was one point upon which Dick was seriously troubled.

He could not make up his mind as to the precise means he should take to reach London.

The question was, should he go with Black Bess or not?

Much was to be said on both sides.

If he took her it would double the chance of his discovery, for she would be more likely to be recognised than himself.

On the other hand, should he leave her behind, he would be cutting off his own escape.

While in this state of indecision, Dick's eyes rested mechanically on one of the vehicles belonging to the strollers.

It was a clumsy-looking covered cart, in which odds and ends of various descriptions had been stowed away.

While looking at it, Dick was reminded of an adventure he once had, which had met with a most successful termination.

It was when, upon the Guildford Road, he had assumed the disguise of a waggoner, and had played the part to such great perfection.

This recollection suggested to him the idea that, among his new friends, he would have plenty of opportunities of disguising himself, and he began to wonder whether it would not be possible to drive to London in absolute safety.

The more he thought upon this project the more he approved of it—especially, as he was unable to think of anything else.

At last he resolved that this should be his mode of action, and all that remained was to arrange with Smithini to have the horse and cart, and to leave Black Bess behind.

There was little difficulty about this—indeed, the stroller's eyes sparkled when the proposition to leave Black Bess in his charge was made to him.

"She's a beautiful-looking creature," he said, "and well known, so that it may prove not a little dangerous to travel with her; but if you make up your mind to leave her in my charge I will disguise her so effectually that even you would be in doubt as to her identity—at least, at first sight."

"Indeed?" said Dick, curiously. "How?"

"I will show you."

He hastened to the yellow caravan, and presently returned with a stone bottle, and brush.

"Catch her," he said, "and I will show you now."

"She wants little catching," answered Dick, and as soon as he spoke he gave the signal whistle.

There was a beat of hoofs, and in a moment Black Bess was by his side.

"There are few horses capable of learning such a trick as that," said the stroller—"very few, and I have had some experience in it. Why, she could be made to do anything."

"I believe it."

"Keep her quiet then, and you will see what an alteration can be made in the course of a few moments."

Dick possessed absolute control over his mare, so he had no difficulty in keeping her quiet while the stroller began his preparations.

Dick quickly guessed at his intention, and requested him to go on without stopping until the operation was completed.

The stone bottle contained a preparation they made use

of to keep the coat of a horse perfectly and dazzlingly white.

He began with the head first and foremost.

With considerable skill he made a white star upon Black Bess's forehead just between her eyes which alone altered her appearance greatly.

So well too was this done, that it would have required a very close examination indeed to have discovered the deception.

More white was placed around the lower part of the head in such a manner as to look perfectly natural.

Then each of her feet was painted white likewise.

"There," said the stroller, as he drew back, "that's an alteration, is it not? and it will stand everything except a good wetting; but you see how simple the operation is, and how quickly it can be renewed."

Dick was delighted, and so much was his mare disgusted that he felt half inclined to make his journey upon her back.

In this, however, he was overruled, for the stroller assured him that she should be perfectly safe.

The cart was now quite ready, and Dick, having taken a last look at his bonny mare, hastened to the spot where Maud was standing in order to bid her farewell.

At the prospect of parting and remaining for some time in the company of people who were perfect strangers to her, Maud could not restrain her tears.

She wept and sobbed as though her heart would break.

She clung to Dick tightly, convulsively, for she had in her heart the presentiment that he would again fall into the hands of his enemies.

But Dick endeavoured to make light of the whole matter, and finally managed to tear himself away.

An old fustian suit of clothes was brought forward by the stroller, and these were large enough to allow Dick to place them on over his ordinary apparel.

The effect of all this was to give him a much more bulky appearance than he usually wore.

A dirty-white felt hat with a large flapping brim was placed upon his head, and it served in no trifling degree to conceal his features.

Then round his neck he wore one of those huge woollen mufflers so frequently seen wrapped around the mouths of carsters and waggoners.

Indeed, after a little trouble in disguising himself, Dick looked the character wonderfully, and when he cracked his whip and assumed a lounging, awkward gait, the impersonation was perfect.

"Do not fear for me," said Dick; "I feel quite assured all will be well; in such a disguise as this the cleverest police officer in London would fail to recognise me—even old Matthew himself will not know me. Depend upon it, Maud, I will be careful, and if possible I will be with you by daybreak in the morning, but if I don't come you must not infer from my absence that I am in any danger."

"Do come," said Maud, weeping still—"do come, for I shall suffer a thousand anxieties until I witness your return."

Dick laughed at her fears, then, scrambling up into the cart, he seated himself in front of it, wrapping himself up well in several old sacks and pieces of canvas, and when he had thus prepared himself in readiness to start, Maud could not help admitting that he looked as unlike himself as he possibly could do—indeed, the transformation was so complete that she could scarcely believe in it.

CHAPTER CMVII.

DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE IS PUT TO A VERY SEVERE TEST.

DICK TURPIN was not long in finding that the horse harnessed to the covered cart was of very indifferent quality indeed, and required no small amount of whipping to urge beyond a jog trot of about four miles an hour.

It was clear that he would have to rely altogether upon the excellence of his disguise and the unlikelihood that he should be suspected of playing such a part.

Should flight even become necessary it was quite out of the question.

As he rode on, however, a consideration presented itself to him, which, in the hurry and confusion of events, he had overlooked.

This was that, as he was journeying towards London, he would run a very great risk of meeting either with Jack Marshall or some of his officers.

They might allow him to ride by them unquestioned, but then again they might not, and Dick by no means relished the prospect of putting the excellence of his disguise to so severe a proof.

Had the horse been capable of making the better speed, Dick would certainly have made his way to London by a very circuitous route.

But time was of great importance, and he felt constrained to take the nearest and most direct road.

While jogging on thus and making these reflections, he suddenly perceived, upon looking up, a troop of officers at no great distance on the road before him.

At the first sight he thought they were advancing, but quickly found that this was an error.

For some reason or other they had come to a halt, and had collected into a dense throng.

What reason they could have for adopting this proceeding, Dick, of course, had no idea.

Yet he soon found by their gestures that a very animated discussion was going on among them.

It must be confessed that Dick by no means relished thus riding direct among his foes, yet how was he to avoid it?

In all probability his approach had been noticed, and if he slackened his speed or turned back, suspicion would be aroused.

Clearly he had no resource but to drive on, putting trust in the hope that they would allow him to pass through their midst unquestioned.

Dick felt uneasy, and to conceal his uneasiness he began to sing a song that he had learnt in his boyhood, and certainly the fact of his doing this was calculated to lead to the impression that he was quite at his ease.

He next perceived that the spot where the officers had assembled was just where two roads crossed each other.

Although he kept singing, Dick strained his ears in the hope of being able to catch some word or other uttered by his foes.

But in this he was unsuccessful.

At length, when very near to them, the whole body of officers, numbering altogether about thirteen, faced round and looked at him.

"Hullo you there!" said a voice, which he recognised immediately as being that of Jack Marshall. "Stop your confounded row a moment, and just pay attention to me!"

"Murder!" said Dick, as he abruptly reined in his horse.

The animal readily enough came to a standstill.

"How far have you come along this road?" asked Jack Marshall, in blustering tones.

"Be that your business now?" asked Dick.

"It is my business!" said Jack Marshall. "Do you see that?"

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a small constable's staff with a gilt crown on the top of it.

"Yes, I see it," said Dick, whose voice was as perfectly disguised as any voice could be, so that it is no wonder whatever that Jack Marshall should fail to recognise it.

"Well, then, you will understand that we are officers, and representatives of his Majesty the King. We are in pursuit of a highwayman."

"Oh, murder!"

"Hold your row, will you, and just tell me how far you have travelled?"

"Well, sir," said Dick, touching his hat, and suddenly assuming a very respectful demeanour, "may be a matter of thirty miles or thereabout."

"Thirty miles, eh? And I suppose you have not let anyone pass you on the road without just having a look at them, eh?"

"Well, I can't say that I have."

"Then just pay particular attention to what I am going to say, and, mind you, I give you this caution, that if you speak untruthfully you will be liable to arrest and imprisonment at any moment."

Dick pretended to be desperately frightened.

"Now, then, once more pay attention: Have you seen a man mounted on a black horse, carrying a female before him in the saddle?"



[DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE IS PUT TO A SEVERE TEST.]

"Mounted on a black horse?" repeated Dick, as though endeavouring to tax his memory, but in reality he was debating within himself whether he should return an affirmative or negative reply.

If he said yes, the officers would doubtless ride along the road he had just traversed, and if so, would come up with the strollers, and so bring Maud into danger; whereas, if he said no, he might be troubled with them still further.

Yet this was the course which, in a brief and scarcely noticeable hesitation, he resolved to adopt.

"No, sir," he said. "I have been thinking carefully. I haven't seen nobody on a black horse."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite."

"I said so, M^r. Marshall," interrupted an officer at this moment—"I said so. I feel quite convinced that he must have taken this turning to the left!"

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"And I say he must have gone to the right," exclaimed another voice, "since that would take him quickest into the open country—he would have no town and villages in his way!"

"Hold your row, all of you," roared Jack Marshall, "and leave me to manage matters myself!"

Then turning to Dick, he said:

"I believe you are deceiving me."

"Me deceive you, sir?" said Dick. "Not on no account—I wouldn't be guilty of such a thing. There's nobody like what you have described passed me since I started."

There was no good reason for doubting Dick's word, and most certainly there was nothing in his manner in the least degree suspicious.

Perhaps, had it been day instead of night, he would not so easily have avoided recognition.

But darkness was greatly in his favour.

Yet Jack Marshall was not satisfied, and for the simple reason that he had got the idea firmly fixed in his mind that Dick had taken the straightforward road.

He had maintained this very vigorously in spite of the general voice of his men, who were all inclined to think that the highwayman had turned either to the left or the right.

This, in fact, was the subject of discussion when Dick first caught sight of them.

It was mortifying, then, in the extreme for Mr. Marshall thus to find himself in the wrong.

"What have you in your cart?" he asked, at length.

"Nothing at all, sir—just nothing at all. I am going now to London to fetch my load."

Jack Marshall determined to have a peep at the interior of the vehicle, being moved to do so by the thought that if he found the waggoner speaking the truth in this instance it would be only fair to presume that the information he had just given was correct.

Accordingly, riding to the back of the cart, Jack Marshall lifted up the canvas, and, one of his men producing a light, took a peep at the interior.

The cart was evidently empty, save and except a very small quantity of dirty straw that was littered on the bottom of it.

Jack Marshall let go of the canvas with a feeling of disappointment.

He did not know why it was, but somehow there seemed to come over his mind a species of reluctance to part company with the supposed cart.

But he had no pretext for detaining him, and so, gruffly and angrily, bade him drive on. Dick gladly enough complied with the mandate, and left the officers to make up their minds whether to turn to the left or the right.

He drew a long breath when he found that he had fairly escaped from this danger, for once or twice he had felt particularly uneasy, especially when Jack Marshall had called for a light.

Now that all had passed off so well, he was able to find ample grounds for congratulation.

His disguise had successfully withstood a very severe test, and certainly this incident encouraged him not a little in the hope that he should carry out his mission successfully.

It must not be thought, however, that it had the effect of in any way abating his caution.

Suddenly, however, the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs going at a furious gallop smote upon his ears.

There was a bend in the road, so that he was not able to see for any great distance before him.

But the clattering sound increased, and then, with great suddenness, the single horseman, going at the utmost speed of which his horse was capable, appeared in sight.

Despite the suddenness of the whole affair—for when Dick first caught sight of the rider he was only a few yards in advance of him—he recognised him.

It was his old, faithful, well-tried comrade, Tom King.

Beyond all doubt, he was being hotly pursued by police officers, though at present the clatter of their horses' feet could not be heard.

Involuntarily a shout came from Dick Turpin's lips.

It caused the flying horseman to turn his head, and if Dick had had up to that moment any doubt as to the identity of this horseman, all his doubt would have been set at rest, for Tom King's countenance was fully exposed to view.

In the excitement of the moment, Dick forgot he was disguised, and wondered how it was his comrade did not recognise him.

All Tom did, however, was to apply his spur more vigorously to his horse's already-bleeding flanks, and the next moment he was far away down the road.

The beat of his horse's feet soon became inaudible, and scarcely had this happened than Dick distinctly heard the approach of a large body of mounted men.

The speed they were coming at was something startling.

"Confound it!" Dick muttered. "I am doomed to be unfortunate to-night! Ten to one I shall have to encounter this second troop of officers, and it's rather too

much to expect that my disguise will stand a scrutiny a second time."

His resolve was, however, quickly taken.

He would push on at the best speed the miserable horse was capable of making, and he trusted, by keeping close to one side of the way, to be out of the way of the horsemen, who would thus gallop past without any obstruction.

To this end, then, he pulled the left rein rather sharply, for up to the present moment he had kept in the middle of the highway.

The horse, not expecting such a movement, or making a false step, or crossing its legs from some other cause, stumbled, and before Dick could save it, fell down upon its side, where it lay without making the slightest effort to rise again.

CHAPTER CMVIII.

DICK TURPIN RUNS A RISK TO RENDER HIS COMRADE, TOM KING, A SERVICE.

Dick's vexation and anger now reached their climax.

By the merest chance in the world, he had saved himself from being hurled from his seat when the horse suddenly fell down.

Descending carefully, he went to the creature's help, and endeavoured to force it to rise.

Before he had time to do anything further than this the troop of officers came in sight.

The cart was now drawn most awkwardly across the road, occupying nearly the whole of it.

The police officers evidently caught sight of the obstruction, for a loud shout came upon Dick's ears.

His position now was about as awkward and perilous as could well be imagined.

Should he be recognised, nothing in the world could save him either from capture or death—no other alternative would be offered to him.

That presence of mind and coolness which had on so many occasions stood him in such good stead did not desert him on the present occasion, and almost mechanically he made up his mind as to what would be the best thing to do. It was thoroughly to assume the character he had taken up, and to bend all his energies towards assisting his horse to regain his feet.

This could only be done by removing a portion of the harness.

While he was engaged in unfastening the traces, the officers, who had slackened pace when they first caught sight of the horse lying across their path, now came up with him, and, as he had expected, stopped.

"Hullo, fellow!" said a voice.

Dick placed his knee upon his horse's head and looked up.

"Have you travelled far along this road?" was the first question.

"Yes, a good way. But don't bother—don't you see my horse is down!"

"You had better be civil," said the same voice. "We are officers. You must have seen a man gallop past at full speed a few minutes ago. Now, tell me truly, which way did he go?"

Dick had expected this answer, and had wondered whether he should really do his comrade a service by sending the officers on a wrong track.

It could scarcely make Tom's position worse than it was, but then, should the officers discover they had been trifled with, most unquestionably they would take him into custody the next time they encountered him.

But Dick was not likely to hesitate long between considering his own safety and the safety of a companion, so without the least hesitation whatever he answered the officer's question by saying:

"Yes, I seed him sure enough, and a fine rate he was going at for sartin."

"But which way did he go—straight on?" cried the officer, impatiently.

"No—no," said Dick, "he didn't go straight on, leastways, he did too, but not straight along the road."

"You mean he took to the fields?"

"Yes, that's what I mean," said Dick, with a grin and while he spoke he raised his arm and pointed across the meadows. "He jumped his horse clear over that hedge."

he said. "I never saw such a leap in my life, and then down went the Captain, and that's all about it."

"Down went the Captain?" said the officer. "What do you mean by that?"

Dick grinned again so as to show all his teeth, then pointed to his horse.

The officer uttered an impatient exclamation, then, turning round, he addressed himself to his companions, and said:

"No doubt this fellow here speaks the truth; he would be sure to leave the highway at the first opportunity; he would suspect that another party was a little in advance."

"He has, ten to one, got under cover of that wood," said another officer, who had been standing up in his stirrups and looking around at the face of the country as well as the darkness would permit.

"No doubt. Ride on a little way; before going far we must come to a gate which we can pass through, and that would be much better than risking a leap."

The officers were unanimous on this point, and set their horses in motion.

Dick bawled after them.

"Here—here," he said—"stop a minute."

They stopped of course.

"I've done what you wanted," he said, "and one good turn—I've heard say—always deserves another, so perhaps some of you will help me to get Captain up, for I can't do it myself."

The officer uttered an oath, which was the only reply he condescended to make to Dick's request.

Like his followers, he was quite indignant at the idea of such a thing.

Dick smiled quietly to himself, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the officers push open a gate and pass through it into the meadows.

"I hope it will do Tom a good turn," he said—"I do with all my heart! I hope too that he has left the high-road and taken to the fields, otherwise he will stand a good chance of falling foul with Jack Marshall and his troop."

Indeed, Dick was more uneasy on this point than he cared to confess even to himself.

He did not for a moment believe that Tom would be likely to continue galloping along the high-road, and there was a strong probability that upon coming to the spot where Dick had met with Jack Marshall he would turn either to the right or the left.

When a choice is to be made between a right road and a wrong, the latter is almost sure to be chosen, and it was this that made Dick uneasy.

"I can't help him any further," he said, as he applied the whip vigorously to his horse; "he must do as I am doing—shift for himself in the best way he can."

At length, after bestowing many lashes, the unwilling beast struggled to his feet.

Dick harnessed him as rapidly as he could, then, remounting to his seat, continued his interrupted journey.

"If things are to go on at this rate," he muttered, "it will be daybreak before I reach Drury Lane. At the best I shall have a good deal of trouble in leaving London before the day has fairly begun."

This seemed very probable, for the night was growing much advanced, and even if he was so lucky as to meet with no other interruption, a long time must necessarily elapse before he could reach Drury Lane.

At length Dick managed to whip his horse into a shambling, cantering kind of gallop, which, although it threatened every moment to break some portion of the harness, and made the cart jolt most fearfully, yet got over the ground in something like tolerable style.

It was a speed, however, that could not be maintained.

Gradually the animal's pace became slower and slower, until the highwayman was seriously afraid that he would come to a dead stop.

It was just at this crisis that he perceived before him in the distance a faint, twinkling light, and as soon as he perceived it he began to wonder whereabouts he was.

"That surely must be the Boar's Head Inn. Yea," he continued, as he glanced quickly around him, "that's evidently it. Well, I trust no one will be staying there, in which case I will run the risk of making a halt myself."

With this determination he pushed on, but the horse

was fearfully exhausted, and he trembled at every step, and could scarcely put one foot before another.

About ten minutes later the front of the roadside inn was reached.

The light he had seen came from a candle fixed in one of the windows, and this was the only sign of inhabitation that the house displayed.

The stoppage of the clumsy vehicle, however, attracted the attention of those within, for the landlord came bustling out and immediately began bawling for the ostler at the very top of his voice.

CHAPTER CMIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF BESET BY DIFFICULTIES AT THE WHITE HORSE.

THESE cries at length had the effect of causing a dwarfed, ill-shapen man to make his appearance.

He came hobbling forward, and grumbling in no measured terms at having been disturbed, especially by a man of Dick Turpin's appearance.

The landlord contented himself with turning back into the inn, for he knew that, as a rule, drivers of covered carts were not very profitable customers, and it certainly was a waste of time to bestow any extra civility upon them.

Dick dismounted with great agility, and, going close up to the ostler, he said:

"Just do as I want you, and say nothing, and it will be a good job for you."

The only reply Dick received was a stare of wonderment.

"Fetch me first," he said, "a quarter of a peck of oats in a bucket, and half a gallon of new ale—be quick."

The ostler hurried off to obey this command.

It may have been that he guessed something good for himself was about to result.

At length, appearing with the articles ordered, Dick took the bucket containing the corn from him, and then, very much to the ostler's amazement, emptied the whole of the ale into it, and stirred the oats well up with his hand.

The corn was then put before the horse, who at once made a vigorous attack upon it.

"Well," ejaculated the ostler, "that's a rum trick for you to be up to, any way."

"Very likely," said Dick; "but you need say nothing about it, need you?"

"Oh no, I can keep my mouth shut as well as anybody else."

"I thought so. Then just go into the house and fetch another half gallon of ale."

"Another half gallon?"

"Yes, I've said it; there's the money to pay for what I've had."

Dick placed half a guinea in the man's palm.

He soon returned, and Dick took one draught from the foaming tankard, then, giving it back to the ostler, he said:

"You can drink the rest and keep the change for yourself."

The ostler nodded, and winked, and grinned, and went through several strange antics, by all of which he intended to imply that he should maintain an inviolable secrecy.

The horse devoured the oats eagerly, yet some time elapsed before he had finished his meal.

A draught of water was next given him, and Dick prepared to resume his journey.

The effects produced by this stimulating food were really wonderful.

The horse no longer seemed like the same animal.

No sooner did Dick apply the whip to him for the first time than he started off at a rate that must have astonished himself.

The rest of the journey was accomplished without the occurrence of any other incident worthy of record.

Towards the last the horse got terribly knocked up, but then Dick knew he could be well attended to at the White Horse.

More from mere bravado than aught else, Dick made his way to Drury Lane by driving up Long Acre, and jing down Bow Street.

This course took him directly past the principal police station in the metropolis.

At that late hour, however, the place looked dismal and quiet enough.

A miserable oil lamp was flickering over the door, and in front an officer was pacing up and down.

Upon Dick he did not bestow a second glance, and the highwayman, taking the next turning to the left, drove straight up to old Matthew's door, where he paused.

Descending from his seat in as clumsy a manner as he possibly could, and endeavouring to keep up the character he had assumed in the minutest details, he pushed open the door and entered the inn.

The house was almost empty, though from one room came sounds as though some dispute or other were going on.

Taking no notice of this, Dick walked straight up to the bar.

At first he saw no one, but after knocking sharply on the counter the little Jewish boy that old Matthew had taken under his protection made his appearance.

From the description given by his three comrades, Dick was able to recognise this boy easily enough.

His vocation at seeing him was great, and he was sorry that Matthew, generally so acute, should in this instance permit himself to be so grossly imposed upon.

Before he left, Dick determined that the landlord should be no longer in ignorance of the traitor he had got under his roof.

For the moment Dick forgot that this boy was both deaf and dumb, so he called out for brandy-and-water.

The sign which the boy made was so expressive that even had he known nothing about it previously it would have sufficed to let Dick know that he was deficient of the faculties of hearing and speaking.

As is often the case, what this boy lacked in one sense he made up for in another.

He was uncommonly acute, and could tell pretty accurately by the mere movement of the lips what was said to him, especially when any kind of liquor was called for.

Therefore, as soon as Dick spoke he placed his hand upon a small barrel on which the word "Brandy" was painted.

Dick nodded, and the boy immediately proceeded to serve him.

The brandy-and-water was put down on the counter and paid for.

Dick thought the boy looked keenly at him, but he took no notice of that, for by this time he had grown to feel quite confident in his disguise.

He sipped at his brandy-and-water, and the boy retired to the inner room.

Dick now found himself in a position of unexpected difficulty.

In his calculations he had altogether omitted the present contingency.

How to gain access to old Matthew was a mystery.

Had the girl been there as usual the matter would have been easy enough, but with this traitorous boy the case was altogether different.

Reflectively, then, Dick continued to sip at his brandy-and-water, and while he was so engaged he heard the door in front of the inn pushed open and slammed shut.

He turned round at once and saw a man approach whose appearance seemed strangely familiar to him, yet, though he tried his best, Dick could not remember when and where he had seen him before.

This man, with a peculiar gait, lounged up to the bar, and, placing his arms upon the counter, looked closely in Dick's face.

Turpin stood the scrutiny bravely, and he felt pretty certain that this man had not penetrated his disguise.

Dick, however, had recognised him.

When his countenance was revealed by the light in the bar he knew it at once, and remembered where he had seen it before.

He was the man who on a former occasion crept into the inn and concealed himself in the cupboard underneath the counter.

The full particulars of the manner in which this spy had been scalded by old Matthew had of course been re-

lated to Dick, and the man had also been pointed out to him.

Apparently he was no longer a member of the police force, for he was dressed in shabby, ragged garments.

The fact was, he had been dismissed some time before for a gross breach of duty, and since that time had led a precarious life in the streets.

The boy again came forward, for he had witnessed this new arrival.

He recognised the man also, and Dick fancied that a significant glance of recognition was exchanged between them.

The man did not speak, but put down some coppers on the counter.

The boy knew what he wanted, for he produced a small glass of neat gin.

"Going far to-night, governor?" he said, addressing Dick.

"Yes," was the reply, "I have a considerable journey to make."

The man drank his gin very slowly, but continued all the while to gaze into Dick's countenance in a manner that made the highwayman begin to grow uneasy.

Difficulties were increasing around him, nor could he for his life see a clear way out of them.

His glass being by this time finished, he pushed it forward for replenishment, and exactly at this moment a footstep was heard upon the stairs, the foot of which was close to the bar window.

The footstep was a heavy one, and this man no sooner heard it than he tilted up his glass and made a precipitate retreat.

Directly afterwards a door was opened, and old Matthew made his appearance.

"What's the meaning of that confounded row?" he said—"who is it quarrelling there?"

He turned up the passage towards the door of the room from which the angry sounds proceeded.

Dick left the bar counter, and, stepping quickly after the landlord, touched him on the arm and whispered in his ear:

"It is I, Matthew—Dick. Don't be frightened, or speak, or recognise me—that deaf and dumb boy is a traitor and will betray me."

Old Matthew tried to answer, but could not.

He staggered back several paces, nor did he stop until his back, coming in contact with the wall of the passage, brought him to a sudden halt.

His eyes rolled fearfully, and his mouth opened to its fullest extent, while over his whole countenance was spread an expression of utter incredulity.

Dick then did on the spur of the moment the very best thing he possibly could, even had he determined to do so after spending several hours in reflection upon it.

He turned abruptly round, and retraced his steps to the bar counter, where, taking up his glass, he began again to sip his brandy-and-water.

CHAPTER CMX.

DICK TURPIN MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO OLD MATTHEW, AND GIVES HIM A CAUTION.

THUS left to himself, old Matthew recovered from his astonishment more rapidly than he would have done under any other circumstances.

Dick now felt perfectly secure.

He had the utmost faith in old Matthew's resources.

He had learned by experience how fertile he was in expedients of every kind, and therefore did not doubt that he would devise the best means of obtaining an interview without drawing down any suspicion by so doing.

Matthew gave a great start and then became calm, though a close observer could have detected the great amount of agitation under which he laboured.

Carrying out his original intention, he entered the room from which the sounds of quarrel continued to come.

He bestirred himself vigorously, and soon quelled the disturbance.

Having done so, he returned to the bar.

He took no notice whatever of Dick, but, having passed through the door, closed it behind him.

From a shelf he took down a book and carried it into

the little parlour beyond where the deaf and dumb boy was sitting.

By signs he instructed him to copy out some accounts of money owing, as entered in the book, and having thus secured an employment for the young Judas, he returned to the bar.

"Speak to me in a whisper," he said, leaning forward over the counter. "Be careful not to raise your voice."

"All right, Matthew; but don't look so scared."

"Scared?"

"Yes. One would think, to look at you that you had just seen a ghost."

"Worse and worse!"

"How worse?"

"I have seen you!"

Dick laughed lightly.

"Never mind me," he said, "I can look after myself. I don't wish to bring you into any trouble either, so, as soon as I have carried out my intentions, I will depart."

"But, oh! captain," said Matthew, "what could have induced you to be so thoughtless—so insane as to venture here to-night?"

"Pshaw! It's nothing! Am I not well disguised?"

"You are, indeed!"

"Should you have recognised me?"

"I think not. I never knew a change to be so complete."

"Then," said Dick, "I may think myself tolerably safe, I presume?"

"Well—well," cried Matthew, "since you are here, speak quickly, and tell me all you can."

"I intend to do so."

"I don't ask you to come in," said the landlord, "simply because I think you will be safer standing where you are. You need not feel afraid that the police officers will recognise you, and we can carry on a conversation undisturbed."

"I quite approve of the notion," said Dick. "In the first place, then, I have bad news to communicate. Our pleasant life at Ealing has come to an end."

"I knew that," said Matthew, sharply.

"You knew it—how?"

"Why, simply because Ellen, Tom Davis, and his wife were brought prisoners to Bow Street late last night, or rather early this morning."

"Yes, yes—of course. What has been done with them?"

"They were carried before the magistrate, of course."

"Well—well, and the result?"

"What result could you expect? The whole case was made perfectly clear and straightforward. The magistrate said he had never known such an outrageous case in his life."

"Were you present at the trial, then?"

"Of course I was; though it was not exactly a trial, but an examination."

"Well—well, it's much the same thing. You know what I mean."

"I do, and, as you might expect, the magistrate has committed them all three to take their trial next week at the assizes."

"Will their case come on so soon?"

"It will, indeed. Not that I expect it will be on the first day; but perhaps towards the end of the session. At the most they will be brought to trial in eight or nine days."

"Something must be done for them," said Dick, "that's quite clear."

"What can you do?" asked Matthew.

"That I don't know, my friend; but I shall think it over, and, rely upon it, we shall make an effort."

"But, good Heavens!" said Matthew, "if you were so fortunate as to make your escape from the Three Spiders in the way you did, why did you tempt your fate by returning here to-night?"

"Simply because it was a necessity. I have come, Matthew, on purpose to ask you to grant me a favour."

"Name it, and you shall have it."

"Well, then," said Dick, "it will be necessary for me to enter into some kind of explanation."

"Go on; you are perfectly secure. The only thing is, you are in an uncomfortable position to carry on a conversation. I should like you in the parlour yonder, and

to pass a comfortable hour; but that is out of the question."

"So I suppose. Well, this will do for me, so listen."

Dick then, as rapidly as he possibly could, gave old Matthew a brief outline of all the strange adventures that had befallen him in Newgate.

To every syllable Matthew listened with the utmost attentiveness.

He concluded by saying:

"Well, now, you see, Matthew, I feel, and I think you will feel with me, that the Governor of Newgate, having so far befriended me, deserves some kind of reward for it, and that's why I mentioned about the money buried beneath the tree."

"And you have no money?"

"No, Matthew—not a fraction, and for that reason I asked him not to attempt to visit the place until a week had expired."

"I see. And you want me to let you have such a sum of money as you require?"

"That's it, Matthew. I am sorry to trouble you, but it will be all right in the end. You see, but for this unfortunate attack being made so suddenly upon the inn, I should have been able to carry out my intention with the greatest of ease."

"Of course you would! But what a pity, captain, for you to run the risk of your life upon such a trifling matter as that!"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"How could I help it?" he said. "Would you have me break my word?"

"You might have sent a messenger."

"Where do you think I could obtain one? No—no, my friend, I consider that I have managed things very well indeed. I am quite contented with all that I have done so far."

"Well, perhaps you ought to be," said Matthew, reflectively, "for with so sharp a look-out as to my certain knowledge is kept for you, it seems marvellous that you should have reached here unseen."

"Stop a minute," said Dick, "and I will tell you something that will give you still more confidence in my disguise. It is a capital joke, too."

Matthew prepared to listen, and Dick accordingly favoured him with an account of his adventures on the road.

Old Matthew listened to the recital with the most uncomfortable feelings.

But Dick tried to make as light of all the incidents as he possibly could.

"But it's running too great a risk," he said—"it's carrying matters too far. For your own sake and for others you ought to be more careful."

"But what better result could I hope for or obtain?" said Dick. "Careful or not, here I am, you see, in safety."

"Yes, so you are—I can't deny that; but still, don't be too bold—don't boast of what you have done. The sooner you start from here, the better; so I will fetch you the money you want at once."

"Don't be in too much hurry, Matthew. I have one or two important things to talk over before I can take my departure."

"Well—well, but be quick."

"I will. In the first place, you must contrive by some means or other to get rid of that rascally boy of yours."

"Yes," said Matthew, with a sudden start, and glancing towards the inner room. "You said something about his betraying you."

"Yes, and he will do it. When Tom, Claude, and Jack were here last, if you remember, you sent him for their horses. He put the officers upon the scent, and, had not my three comrades started off themselves, their capture must have been certain, and it would have happened, too, at your very door."

"Is this really true?" exclaimed Matthew, scarcely able to believe what he heard.

"Perfectly true," said Dick; "and therefore I say don't hesitate any longer about getting rid of him. If you keep him, he will some day or other bring about your destruction."

"He shall go, captain—no and go at once. I will have no traitors beneath my roof! I confess there are

many things which I have discovered which I have not liked, yet I have looked upon all his delinquencies with a lenient eye, for, Dick, I knew his father. He was one of my best friends, and a truer, better man never breathed."

"Then it's a pity he is so unworthy a son."

"He is dead now, Dick, and his mother too. She was a Jewess, and it is from her no doubt, that he inherits his treacherous disposition."

There was a tone of deep regret perceptible in old Matthew's voice as he thus spoke, and it was quite certain that it would cost him a pang thus to get rid of the son of his old friend.

CHAPTER CXXI.

AFFAIRS AT THE WHITE HORSE INN ASSUME A CRITICAL ASPECT.

"SAY no more upon the point, Dick," were the landlord's next words. "You have nothing more to fear of him; I will take effectual means to get rid of him."

"And now, then, before you go, tell me in a few words about Maud. And the rest—where are they?"

Dick complied, and then added:

"Tom King was in great peril I know; how he has fared, of course I can tell no better than yourself; and as for Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, I have not seen them since we parted."

"Well, well, and I suppose you hope to meet all together some time before Tom Davis is brought to trial?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"But, then, if you do, in what way are you to help him?"

"I am not prepared to say, Matthew; but between now and then you can think it over as well as myself, and no doubt something will suggest itself."

"I will try," said Matthew, "for after all that he has done, it would be a world of pities for Tom Davis to be sentenced to transportation for life, and you may depend that is the lightest penalty they will inflict upon him."

"It must not be—it shall not be!" said Dick, vehemently, and bringing his hand down with great force upon the counter.

"Hush—hush!" said Matthew. "Be careful; you forget your caution."

"I did for the moment; but Tom Davis must be saved or rescued, no matter at what sacrifice. If you have means of communicating with him, don't fail to let him know what I have said."

"I shall be able to communicate with him, no doubt; but now, Dick, whether you have anything more to say or not, let me entreat you to depart. I will go upstairs and fetch the money you require; I will not be a moment longer than I can help."

Dick assented, and the landlord at once hastened upstairs.

No sooner had old Matthew departed than the treacherous boy issued from the inner room.

He glanced stealthily and quickly around him for a second, then, with an assumption of boldness, walked towards the door, opened it, and passed into the passage.

Under the circumstances, Dick wondered how far he should be justified in interfering with the movements of this lad.

It might be that his deafness was only simulated, and if so, he could easily have overheard sufficient of the conversation to let him know that it was only a seeming carter who stood at the bar.

In this case he would, beyond a doubt, communicate with those outside.

Should he run the risk of allowing him to pass by?

That was the question uppermost in Dick's mind, and he had very little time to make up his mind concerning it.

The boy marched on, pretending to look very indifferent indeed, but only partially succeeding.

He had to pass quite close to where Dick was standing, and just as he reached this spot the highwayman suddenly stepped out his foot.

The boy did not see it, or, at any rate, not until too late, for he was tripped up as cleverly as it was possible for anyone to be.

He fell with a tremendous crash on his face in the passage, and lay for a moment as though half stunned.

Then, springing rapidly to his feet, he plunged one hand into the breast of his coat, as though he had a weapon concealed there.

His whole face then looked like a demon's.

His eyes flashed, and his teeth were closely clenched together.

Blood was streaming from his face, but Dick pitied him not in the least—indeed, he was glad to think the opportunity had been afforded him of giving the rascal a taste of what he deserved.

If his first intention had been to draw any concealed weapon, a second thought made him change his mind.

Stamping and scowling with rage, he continued his course along the passage.

Just then, however, old Matthew could be heard descending the staircase, and immediately afterwards the door at the foot of the stairs was flung open.

The boy saw him, and stopped irresolutely.

Dick said, in a suppressed voice:

"Look, Matthew, there he goes! I stopped him a little, but he wants to give the alarm!"

Old Matthew deposited a heavy bag of money on the counter with a dash, and then, with a rapidity of movement that no one could have expected from a man of his years and bulk, he darted along the passage, and seized the boy by the back of the neck.

"You rascal!" he said—"you infernal scamp! But I will pay you out for this! Oh, confound it," he added, "I forgot he can't hear a word I say!"

"Secure him somewhere," said Dick.

"Never fear," answered old Matthew. "Look to yourself—leave him to me. There's the money."

"All right, I have it."

"Then now depart."

"No, no—not so hurriedly! Place that boy securely somewhere, and then come to me."

Reluctantly Matthew consented.

The boy kicked, and plunged, and struggled, but all was in vain.

In Matthew's hands he was powerless to do anything at all in the shape of resistance that was worthy of the name.

As soon as he had dragged him into the inner room, old Matthew flung the boy into the large easy-chair beside the fire.

At the same moment, with great dexterity, he whipped off his huge apron, and twisted it up like a rope.

This he passed under the boy's chin, and round the back of the chair, where he tied it so tightly that the boy was obliged to cease struggling at once, otherwise he would have been in imminent danger of strangulation.

To fasten his hands was now an easy task, and as he was dumb the necessity for gagging him was done away with.

"He is all right now," Matthew said, as he came out of the parlour and quietly shut the door behind him. "I could never have believed that he was such a little villain."

"He is a dangerous creature indeed," said Dick, "and I should advise you to be very careful how you deal with him. His disposition is malicious—nay, even fiendish, and he would not care to what length he went in order to obtain his revenge."

"I don't fear him," said Matthew, "and just at the present moment you will admit that we have something more important to talk about."

"We have."

"Well, then, captain, as you have got the money safe, let me once more entreat you to depart. Don't think I am anxious to get rid of you. I am only concerned for your safety."

"I know that, old friend. Don't think I misunderstand your notions."

"Consider for a moment," continued the landlord, "how awkward a fix you would be in should you unfortunately be recognised. You have no Black Bees now to carry you clear of your pursuers, only that miserable horse at the door."

"Have you seen it?"

"Yes. I peeped at it through one of the windows upstairs."

"It is a miserable wretch; but then I think I am tolerably safe."

"Well, will you go?"

"I will, Matthew, and many thanks to you for the favour you have done me to-night."

"Pooh—pooh! Don't mention it."

"I shall not forget it, rest assured of that. And now I must ask you to lay me under one more obligation."

"And what is that?"

"Just go to the door, and have a look up and down the street. Tell me whether you see anyone hanging about who looks suspicious—in a word, see whether the coast is clear."

"I will, Dick. That is well thought of."

The landlord hastily made his way to the front of the inn.

He was absent about five minutes; then he returned with a very serious look upon his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"Why, the coast is not clear."

"Indeed! Who's about?"

"Why, a man who owes me a bitter grudge. He has sworn over and over again to have his revenge. You remember, I daresay, that an officer concealed himself in this cupboard here, and I scalded him well with a kettleful of boiling water?"

"Yes, I remember. He was at the bar, drinking, a moment before you came downstairs."

"To-night?"

"Yes—most certainly to-night—a little while ago."

Old Matthew gave a long, low whistle.

"That's awkward," he said—"very awkward!"

"And what's more," continued Dick, "it's very odd to me if a secret sign or glance of intelligence did not pass between him and that nice little boy of yours."

Old Matthew gave a low groan.

"If that's it, captain, depend upon it it's all's over! You're nabbed—nabbed as sure as you are a living man!"

"How so, Matthew?" said Turpin, feeling fearfully uneasy. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I must tell you that this man was sometime ago dismissed from the police force; but ever since then he has acted as a spy for the rest. His old companions give him a trifle now and then, and he sniffs out information for them."

"A regular spy, in fact?"

"Yes, nothing less, and in consequence of that little trick I served him, he cherishes the most violent hatred against me. I have been told he has frequently declared he will never rest until he has brought about my ruin, and for that reason he is always hanging about in the street."

"You make me very uncomfortable, Matthew," said Dick Turpin. "I hope things are not quite so bad as you make out. He looked keenly at me as I stood beside him at the counter; but I feel pretty sure there was no recognition on his part."

"Well, there may not be," said old Matthew, seeming rather relieved upon receiving this assurance.

"But," continued Dick, "if I had not stopped that boy as I did, you may depend he would not have been in ignorance of my identity by this time."

CHAPTER CMXII.

DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON THE SPY.

OLD MATTHEW rubbed his head most vigorously, as was his habit when anything occurred of a troublesome nature.

"I wish I knew how to solve the point," he ejaculated, after a brief pause, "but how on earth to discover whether any police officers are lurking outside I know not."

"Is it not possible," said Dick, "that you magnify the danger?"

"In what manner?"

"May it not be that this man is only skulking about outside in his usual fashion?"

"There is a possibility of it."

"You have not seen anything else suspicious, have you?"

"No, nothing more, I saw no trace of officers, and yet,

whenever I see him I think they are never far distant."

"And what was he doing?" asked Dick.

"Why, when I first went to the door, I saw nothing, but I stood perfectly still looking about me, then I fancied I heard a slight movement in the cart, and so drew back into the shadow of the doorway as well as I could."

"A noise in the cart?"

"Yes, and immediately afterwards that fellow lowered himself out of it."

"That's very strange," said Dick.

"So I think," returned Matthew. "He must have had some suspicions, or why should he have adopted such a proceeding as that?"

"Curse him!" said Dick, clenching his fists. "I wish I could lay hold of him somehow; I'd put an end to his speaking for some time to come. But for him, no doubt I could have driven off quietly, without anyone being the wiser."

"Very likely indeed," said Matthew; "but I am afraid there's little chance of it now, though I don't wish to say anything to discourage you."

Dick drew a long breath.

"How had I better act, Matthew?" he said, at length.

The landlord shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could advise you," he said; "but this is a matter that baffles me altogether. You see, he may have told the officers that he suspected you were only an assumed carter, and if so, they would arrest you on bare suspicion."

"And I suppose," continued Dick, "they would take care not to show themselves until I emerged into the street."

"Decidedly not; and, for aught I know, a dozen of them may be hidden somewhere."

"It bothers me," said Dick—"it bothers me entirely."

Old Matthew began to think.

"Look here," he said, at length, "this is the best thing I can think of."

"Out with it, then."

"I will put on my hat and go outside, take hold of the horse's head, and lead him round the corner, into Clare Market."

"And what good would that do?" said Dick, in some amazement.

"Why, this much: I should have my eyes about me, and if any police officers were concealed I should at once become aware of it, for, don't you see, they would either attempt to prevent me from moving the cart, or else I should see them quit their place of concealment and follow it."

"So you would, Matthew—so you would; that didn't occur to me. But what shall I do in the meanwhile?"

"I will tell you; there will be no difficulty about it."

"I am glad to hear it."

"As soon as I go to the front of the house, listen. If you hear no contention or disturbance—if, in fact, you do not hear me raise my voice—conclude all is well, and just hasten down the passage, and through that door. You will then be in that little yard that is well known to you. Open the other door, and you will find yourself in White Horse Yard. Make your way along it into Clare Market, and look about for me. If you see me, and all is well, I shall be patting the neck of the horse, and stroking it; but if I am not doing so do not show yourself, but clear off in the best way you are able."

Dick Turpin was highly delighted with this plan, and congratulated old Matthew upon his ingenuity.

"I can't stop to listen to anything of that sort," he said, as he took his broad-brimmed hat down from a peg. "I will be off, and be sure you listen whether there is a noise outside."

The next moment old Matthew passed through the front door, and Dick listened eagerly.

But the silence was not broken by old Matthew's voice, and almost immediately he heard the wheels begin to revolve.

"All right," he muttered. "What a capital old chap Matthew is, to be sure! That's one thing more that I owe him."

While he was speaking he secured the bag of gold about

his person, then, following the instructions he had received, he entered the yard and hastened towards Glaro Market as quickly as his legs would carry him.

He felt rather nervous when he first stepped out into White Horse Yard, but that feeling immediately vanished when he found no notice was taken of his appearance.

From this it was only air to assume that no officers were concealed in that quarter, for if so they would unquestionably have pounced upon him.

Feeling much more easy in his mind, he continued on his way, and having reached a dark, obscure corner, paused to look about him.

A moment or two elapsed before he could catch sight of old Matthew. But at length he perceived him, and to his great joy he saw he was patting the horse upon the neck.

"All right," ejaculated Dick, with a sigh of great relief—"all's going well—I have nothing to fear."

With these words on his lips he hastened to the spot where the horse was standing.

"Look out for the spy," said Matthew, as soon as Dick was close to the vehicle; "there's no one besides him about; he has followed me so far at a distance, and I should not be surprised at his following you."

"Shouldn't you?" said Dick. "Then I should. Where is he—can you see him?"

"Yes, there he is, on the other side of the way, standing near that shop; he is pretending to look at the things in the window."

Old Matthew pointed, and Dick immediately perceived the spy standing at no great distance.

"He won't follow me, I'll warrant!" he exclaimed. "Just bring the horse quietly after me, and see how I will dispose of him."

"Captain—captain," said Matthew, "don't be rash—pray don't be rash! Go quietly away, and leave him to me."

But Dick was quite deaf to these words.

He strode rapidly along the street, then crossed directly over to the shop at the window of which the spy was standing.

Late as was the hour, the shops in the neighbourhood were for the most part unclosed, though apparently little business was being done in any of them.

The spy was evidently taken by surprise by these movements on the part of Dick Turpin.

He was conscious of the highwayman's approach, yet knew not exactly whether to stand still or to fly.

He hesitated until it was too late to make a retreat.

Dick clapped his hand upon his shoulder.

The man faced round at once.

"Don't be so fond of prying into my business," said Dick, in a menacing voice, "or it will be the worse for you, and, just to prove that this is no idle threat, I will give you a taste of what you may expect."

It so happened that the shop before which this man was standing was one belonging to a general dealer in provisions.

Not only in the shop and in the window were his articles exposed for sale, but out upon the pavement as well.

Among other things, cheese was piled up, and there was also an enormous box filled to the brim with eggs, beside which one of the shopmen was standing observing the movements of Dick and the spy with great attention.

No sooner were the last words out of Dick Turpin's mouth than, quick as thought, he seized the spy by the nape of his neck and the seat of his breeches.

With an exertion of his utmost strength, Dick lifted him fairly from the ground, and flung him with full force into the box of eggs.

There was a loud cry, an oath, and a fearful crash.

Then the body of the spy almost completely disappeared, for the eggs gave way immediately beneath his weight.

Dick did not stop to see any more—he knew the sooner he beat a retreat the better.

By this time Matthew had brought the horse close to the shop, and Dick, with extraordinary speed, ascended to his seat and set the horse in motion.

The shopman, who had witnessed the whole transaction, ran forward with the intention of stopping the cart, but old Matthew placed himself full before him.

"Ten pounds," he said—"ten pounds, Tom, if you

keep quiet! You know me. Just make it as hot for the fellow as you can—I owe him a grudge."

The man thus addressed looked rather amazed for a moment, but he knew old Matthew perfectly well, and felt certain he would be as good as his word.

Accordingly, he turned round, and, addressing the poor wretch who was struggling vainly in the box to release himself, said:

"You rascal! What do you mean by this? You shall suffer for it! Here—here! police—police!"

A crowd immediately assembled, though where the people came from so suddenly seemed a mystery.

Just as the cart turned round the corner of the street, Dick looked back, and then he had the satisfaction of beholding the spy still kicking and struggling in his efforts to liberate himself from his unpleasant position.

CHAPTER CXIII

IN WHICH THE SPY ACQUAINTS THE POLICE OFFICERS WITH HIS SUSPICIONS.

OLD MATTHEW, perceiving how ready the shopman was to take the hint that had been given him, drew aside.

He wished most particularly to watch the ensuing proceedings, yet he did not desire to appear to be mixed up in any of them.

A hundred voices began at once what was the matter, but no one seemed in a position to reply.

Rattles were sprung, watchmen came hurrying forward, and lusty throats bawled out for the police.

"Pull me out," roared the man in the box—"pull me out, I say! Won't one of you lend me a hand?"

"Let him alone," said the shopman, as several hastened forward in answer to the appeal—"let him alone, can't you? He's safe prisoner where he is, that's one comfort."

The crowd drew back, and so the spy was thrown upon his own resources.

His furious struggles, however, only served to break more of the eggs, and the consequence was, that instead of getting out of the box at all, he kept gradually sinking lower and lower down into it.

At last, when the confusion had reached its height, a couple of police officers came hastily round the corner.

The people made way for them, and no sooner did they pause in front of the shop than they immediately recognised the spy.

"Seize him," cried the shopman—"seize him! He's a desperate character! Don't let go of him on any account!"

"Why," said one police officer, stopping suddenly short, and gazing with surprise into the countenance of his companion—"why, it's Jackson!"

"Yes, d—n it, it is Jackson, sure enough!" roared the spy. "Help me out, can't you? Don't stand there like a couple of idiots!"

"Come—come, you had better not be abusive. What does it all mean?"

"Pull me out, and I'll tell you pretty quickly."

The officers thought fit to comply with this demand, and by their joint exertions the spy was released from his uncomfortable position.

"Now, then," cried one of the officers, addressing the shopman, "what's this all about? Just explain it!"

"Bah!" said the spy. "Don't be a fool, Brown—don't be a fool!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I speak plain enough! Here, come-closer—I want to whisper something. There—there, what do you think of that?"

The spy whispered something in the ear of Brown, the police officer, which caused that worthy emissary of the law fairly to stagger back.

Then a loud shout of laughter came from the crowd as they perceived the plight Jackson was in.

He had truly taken a most uncomfortable bath, and as the eggs exposed for sale were none of the freshest, a by no means pleasant odour exhaled from him.

"What did he say, Brown?" gasped the other police officer.

"Why, he says that a few minutes ago either Dick Turpin or one of his comrades was here disguised as a carter, and it was in consequence of his recognition that



[DICK TURPIN HURLS THE SPY INTO THE EGG-CHEST.]

he was pushed back into the egg-chest as we found him."

Nothing would content the shopman but having Jackson hauled off to the police station, and there charged with doing wilful damage to his property.

The officers in vain protested that it was all nonsense; the shopman was obstinate, and so they accordingly went.

The matter was hurried over as quickly as possible, and then the spy was questioned more closely as to the intelligence he had given.

When he set forth the details, he was met with general disbelief; and when asked pointedly by what means he had recognised Dick Turpin he was forced to admit that he was not quite confident, but he merely suspected that the carter was the highwayman in disguise, and for this suspicion he could give no other reason than that he had seen him in conversation with old Matthew, the landlord of the White Horse.

No. 187—BLACK BESS.

Still, that was deemed sufficiently important to warrant them in setting out in pursuit of the driver of the cart, and arresting him, if only on the charge of committing an assault upon Jackson.

By the time they had arrived at this resolution, however, a considerable period had elapsed.

The cart had vanished, and no one was in a position to say which way it had gone.

To look for it in any of the myriad streets of London seemed an idle task.

And so the officers felt, although they set about it.

But let it be clearly understood that, if they had known for certain that the carter really was Dick in disguise, their measures would have been of a much more energetic character, and it is quite possible that by making close inquiries and sending out in all directions they might have got upon his track.

This was not done, however.

Only one party of officers went out in pursuit, and these

made little progress, for although they inquired in every direction, they were unable to meet with a single person who could recollect seeing a cart such as they described.

The fact was, Dick, with a boldness to which he certainly owed his safety, had gone straight in the direction of Bow Street, which carried him past the front of old Drury Lane Theatre.

Here the scene was one of tremendous commotion.

The King had gone that night to see the play, and the house was consequently crowded by a highly-fashionable audience.

The street was literally choked up with vehicles.

Amid the general confusion and excitement, Dick was unnoticed as he steadily wound his way in and out through the throng until he got into a clearer street.

Then, lashing his horse, he made him put forth his utmost rate of speed.

Now, if Dick had obeyed the very natural impulse to turn down any one of the quiet streets in the neighbourhood the officers would, in all probability, have got upon his track, as the passage of the vehicle through any one of them must have been seen by some person or other.

He made his way directly westward, but while he journeyed on his thoughts were busy.

He had more causes than one for gratification.

Maud and Black Bess he knew to be in perfect safety, he had performed his errand without accident, and had in his possession a sufficient sum of money to satisfy the Governor of Newgate.

He had also made old Matthew aware of the fact that he had a traitor beneath his roof.

Another consideration, however, now presented itself to Dick's mind, and while he reflected upon it he allowed his horse to proceed very slowly.

Morning, he saw, was yet some hours distant, and the question occurred to him whether he should not avail himself of the present opportunity and secure the bag of gold.

He had fully intended to hasten back to Maud; on then, on his return journey, he might meet with danger, and the bag of money might be lost.

Now he was at no great distance from Hampstead Heath, and by turning off to the right he could reach there in little more than half an hour.

To bury the gold would be the work of a few moments only; then from that point he would be able to make his way to Somefield, where he had appointed to overtake Maud.

"Yes," he said, at length, "that shall be it. My mind is made up. Who can tell how long a time may elapse before I have so good a chance of burying this money as I have now?"

While he spoke the words, he turned abruptly down a dark narrow lane with which he was not very well acquainted, but which, nevertheless, he believed would take him near the point he wished to reach.

This lane was quite deserted, and no wonder, for its condition was disgraceful.

So deep was the mire that the tired horse could hardly struggle through it.

In consequence of this the journey to Hampstead Heath occupied a much longer period than Dick had calculated upon.

At length he paused upon the verge of the vast open space.

It was now necessary to take an observation before proceeding further.

The heath itself appeared to stretch for miles before him in the darkness, and although he turned his eyes in every direction he failed to perceive the glimmering of a single light.

Having formed a tolerably correct idea of his position, Dick turned to the right, and when he paused again it was close to the tree he had described so particularly to the Governor.

And, indeed, the appearance of this tree was so singular that it could not fail to be recognised by anyone who took the trouble to look for it.

Through a low opaque portion of the clouds which covered the sky, the moon sent forth a scattered, watery light, which Dick hailed with pleasure, as it would be of great assistance to him in carrying out his proceedings.

First of all, he stood for several moments in a listening attitude.

The silence was profound, and, without any great stretch of imagination, he could have believed that he was thousands of miles away from any of his fellow-creatures.

The horse seemed quite content to stop for, bending down his head, he commenced eating with great voraciousness the grass that was growing everywhere around.

CHAPTER CMXIV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RECEIVES SOME DISINTERESTED ADVICE.

EVERYTHING all around him so very still, Dick Turpin determined not to lose any more time, but to commence digging a hole in the ground forthwith.

He was but ill provided with tools for this purpose; yet, by using his hands and a knife, he managed in a short space of time to scrape out a considerable quantity of earth.

This being done, he carefully placed the bag in the hole, filled it up with dirt, and carefully pressed down the surface so as to restore it to its original condition.

Once, when he paused in the midst of his labours, he fancied he heard a slight sound close at hand.

He listened immediately; but as it was not repeated he concluded his fancy had misled him.

At last, when all was finished, he rose from his knees, and, as he did so, he felt certain that he caught sight of a dim, shadowy figure in the distance.

A cry of vexation and anger escaped his lips.

There could be no doubt all his proceedings had been watched by some one, and that some one, whoever he might be, would beyond doubt take the first opportunity, after Dick's departure, to try and ascertain what had been buried so carefully among the roots of the old tree.

For a wonder, Dick was at a loss what to do on the spur of the moment, and this hesitation, brief as it was, deprived him of the chance he had of rushing forward and suddenly seizing the intruder.

Now, when he looked all around, nothing but the broad expanse of heath met his view.

"Confound it!" he said to himself. "What shall I do now? To attempt to find him would be perfectly idle. He could dodge me till daybreak. I must think a little while."

By way of assisting himself in this operation, he took hold of the reins, and forced his horse to quit his meal and while he was doing so a bright idea entered his brain.

"I will drive off," he muttered, "and pretend to take no notice, and when I have gone a little way I will descend from the cart, and creep stealthily here on foot. Then, no doubt, he will be thrown off his guard, and I shall be able to seize him."

This resolve was no sooner made than it was carried out, though, at present, Dick had no very clear idea of what he was to do after he had succeeded in capturing the man who, he imagined, had watched his movements.

Despite the danger of such a course, Dick drove across the heath, preferring to do so to trusting to any of the bad roads that intercepted it.

On the soft turf the progress of the cart made scarcely a sound—at any rate, he felt certain that no one could hear it at a distance of a few yards.

Having gone far enough as he imagined to answer his purpose, he stopped the horse and descended.

He was not afraid that the animal would stray far—it would be only too glad of the opportunity to renew its feast.

Shrinking low down to the ground, Dick then swiftly, yet noiselessly, made his way back again to the old tree. As he neared it his speed abated, and his caution increased.

When only a few yards distant, he stopped altogether, and, placing his hands up to his eyes in order to see more distinctly, he strove to pierce the gloom.

Then he saw, or fancied he saw, close to the trunk of

the old tree, the figure of a man kneeling down as he had knelt, and busily engaged in digging up the earth.

The longer he gazed the more confident he felt that he had not made any mistake, so, creeping still closer, and watching for a favourable opportunity, he made a sudden bound upon the stranger, who little suspected his return.

A yell of fear broke the silence that had for some time reigned around the spot.

The man, finding himself in the grasp of some one, trembled from head to foot, and would have fallen to the ground had not Dick held him up.

"Who are you?" he roared. "Let me see your face? Why are you here?"

"Oh, mercy!" said a voice, in humble tones. "Do have mercy upon me—pray do!"

"I know that voice," said Dick, peering intently into the stranger's face, "and yet surely it must be a mistake."

"No, no—not any mistake," was the reply, "for I know your voice now, captain. It's all right. Mr. Bradbury, at your service."

Dick released his hold instantly.

"You have cause to be thankful that you have escaped so well. I am generally hasty in my movements, and not very particular as to what I do. However, I'm glad it's all right."

The Governor grunted and rubbed himself very vigorously with both his hands at the back of his neck, for Dick's grasp had been by no means a tender one.

"Oh!" he said, "you gave me a dreadful fright—an awful fright!"

"Indeed! How so?"

"I will tell you. I don't mind confessing that this tree has haunted my imagination ever since you spoke to me about it, and it has only been by the exercise of great self-command that I have kept myself from paying a visit to this spot for so long, but to-night I felt impelled to make my way here. I could not resist the temptation."

"And you saw me digging here, I suppose?" said Dick.

"I fancied so," said the Governor, "but could not make sure. I didn't know whether to advance and make myself known, or remain in concealment, and while I was debating this point in my mind you got up into the cart and drove away."

"Well, and then?"

"Why, I thought the best thing I could do was to possess myself of the treasure, and make haste back to London, so I began to dig, as you see."

"And did you not guess that I had returned?"

"No," said the Governor—"not for a moment. I believed some other person had been watching, and, having seen all that had been done, had come forward with the intention of appropriating the money himself."

"I see, and hence your alarm. Well, you have good cause for gratification. The money you will find perfectly safe, tied up in a leather bag, and I hope the amount will satisfy your expectations."

"You have just placed it there, of course?" said the Governor, inquiringly.

"You had better not trouble yourself to make any inquiries upon that point," said Dick. "Let it suffice that you find the money where I told you would. I may have come to-night merely to make sure that the money was safe, you understand."

"The Governor said 'Yes,' but it is questionable whether he really understood what Dick means or not."

"Well, captain," he added, after a short pause, "there's been a tremendous commotion in Newgate, I can assure you!"

"No doubt."

"I confess that I have been in a perpetual state of fever ever since your departure. I have trembled for your safety."

Dick smiled.

"I am all right, you see, and well able to take care of myself. I was by Bow Street police station a little while ago, but things seemed quiet enough there."

The Governor repeated the words in a tone of incredulous amazement.

"It's quite true," said Dick, carelessly, "and I daresay you will hear something of it when you get back to London."

"You are too rash," said the Governor—"much too rash! You tempt your fate. I am much obliged to you for your behaviour to me, for a little extra money will be of the greatest utility to me at the present moment. I like you, captain—indeed I do!"

"I am glad to hear it."

"And as proof of it," added the Governor, coming a step closer, "I will give you a word of advice, and I only hope you will have sufficient good sense to act in accordance with it."

"Well," said Dick, "I am prepared to listen to any suggestion you like to make, but I cannot pledge myself to act in accordance with it."

"Well, then, my advice is not only to you, but to all your companions, to take the very first opportunity you can find of leaving England. It is truly too hot to hold you, and so you will find to your cost."

Dick uttered a half-impatient exclamation.

"You receive my advice with disdain," said the Governor, with a slightly-mortified air. "But, then, I know very well good advice is generally thrown away. This is good advice, as anyone would tell you who had considered your position. If you were only a little careful, you could manage to get down somewhere on the south coast, and there engage a fisherman at some quiet spot or other to take you across the channel. He could run you ashore on some lonely part of the coast of France, and there you would be perfectly safe."

"Well—well," said Dick, thoughtfully, "I am ready to admit that the advice you have given is well worthy of consideration, and rest assured that when I meet my comrades the next time I will suggest it to them. For the present we must say farewell, and I hope, without meaning any offence to you, that we shall never meet again."

"Farewell, captain!" said the Governor. "I do not echo your wish, for, as I said before, I rather like you; but if we do meet, I really hope it will be in some place where you are in safety."

"Thanks for the wish," said Dick. "And now again good-bye! Dig a little deeper, and you will find the reward I promised you. In spite of obstacles from which most men would have shrunk back with alarm, Dick Turpin has been as good as his word."

He turned abruptly upon his heel as he spoke, and vanished almost immediately from the sight of the Governor, who, without further delay, dropped down upon his knees again, and resumed his task of digging beneath the tree.

CHAPTER CMXV.

DESCRIBES THE STRANGE ADVENTURE THAT DICK MET WITH ON HIS WAY TO SOMEFIELD.

Dick had some little difficulty in finding the cart, but not much; and, having succeeded, he once more climbed into his seat, and set the horse in motion.

The night had been an unusually dark one, and now, strangely enough, although daybreak was approaching, it positively grew darker, so that Dick had to make his way with the greatest caution—in fact, he trusted more to the instinct of his horse to keep him clear of any obstructions in the path than he did to his own eyesight; consequently the heath was crossed in safety, and when once he emerged upon the road, Dick felt in a position to resume the command.

Applying the whip unsparingly, he induced the wretched animal to make something like tolerable progress along the road.

It was still necessary to keep a sharp look-out, although Dick was perfectly familiar with every object around—in fact, there were few parts round London that he was better acquainted with than with this.

In order to reach Somefield, it was necessary to travel by the Oxford Road, without a considerable circuit was made.

Now Dick felt by no means inclined to adopt this course.

There was danger, to be sure, in venturing along such a well-frequented high-road; but then, on the other hand, the hour was one when few people were likely to be travelling, and he hoped, by making an effort, to get so far by daybreak as to be able to make the rest of his way through the narrow, winding lanes.

This, then, was the course he adopted, and, as he had correctly anticipated, he journeyed on and on for miles without so much as catching a glimpse of a human being.

When the Oxford Road was fairly reached, his rate of progress became much accelerated, for the ground was firm and smooth beneath the horse's feet.

In this manner he continued without meeting with the slightest interruption until day began to dawn.

Huge masses of white mist hung over all the meadows, and so obstructed the view that it was not possible to see for any great distance.

By degrees the morning broke clearer and brighter.

Dick plied the whip with renewed energy, for he had not got so far upon his journey by this time as he hoped.

The sun rose, and found him descending into a hollow, very disagreeable piece of roadway, and one that was detested by every traveller.

The road was travelled down the declivious sides of two long, high hills, which formed indeed a most delightful valley.

Owing to the deep shadows cast by the trees that grew luxuriantly near the foot of these hills, the bottom or lowest part of the road was almost plunged in gloom, and it was here that many an ambush had been laid for passing travellers.

Now the valley was almost filled with the white, fleecy mist of which we have spoken.

But the sun, rising higher and higher, gradually dispelled it.

It rolled away in huge, undulating masses, until at length the sun, appearing above the summit of the hill, poured down a full flood of golden light.

The scene then was one of real beauty, and there were few indeed who could look upon it without sensations of admiration.

Dick was not one of them, and as, after reaching the bottom of the descent, he commenced to urge his horse up the precipitous hill before him, he looked around him with feelings of real delight.

By chance, when about three-parts up this hill, he glanced upwards, and then beheld a sight which filled him with the greatest astonishment—so much so that he unconsciously pulled the rein, and the horse, feeling the check, stopped at once.

Of this circumstance he also remained in ignorance, for all his faculties were bound up in watching what he saw on the brow of the hill above.

First he saw, with extraordinary distinctness, the figure of a man on horseback.

It needed not a second glance to enable Dick to recognise this horseman; it was his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack.

Suddenly another horseman appeared in sight, and a greeting of the warmest description then took place between them.

This other horseman was Claude Duval; Dick recognised him perfectly.

He sat where he was like a man in a dream.

Dick saw Claude raise his riding-whip and point in a certain direction.

Sixteen-String Jack turned his head to look, and some laughing remark appeared to be exchanged.

But what filled Dick with the greatest surprise was that there seemed a kind of mistiness and unreality about the figures which he thus beheld.

He thought it strange that, being on the brow of the hill as they were then, and with their horses' heads turned towards him, that they did not observe his presence.

Dick resolved to make himself known, and shouted.

His voice, clear and loud, rang out with great distinctness in the valley, and most certainly the sound must have reached the ears of any persons above.

To Dick's amazement, however, not the slightest notice was taken by Claude and Jack.

He shouted again and again, but with no better effect than before.

Wondering also strange a circumstance, and feeling a kind of awe in his breast, he gazed again in silence, in order to make sure that his senses were not deceiving him.

No, there could be no mistake—Claude and Jack were surely there.

Having come to this conclusion, he once more raised his whip and started his horse.

At a clumsy half-canter, half-gallop, the tired beast struggled up the remainder of the hill.

When within about a hundred yards or more of the top, Dick shouted again, and at the precise moment when the sound escaped his lips the two figures instantly vanished, so suddenly that it was impossible to say in what direction they had gone.

They seemed to be annihilated in the twinkling of an eye.

More puzzled still, Dick continued his course upward.

"They have gone down the hill on the other side," he said—"yes, that must be it. But how suddenly they went—they seemed to dissolve into the air; and their horses' heads were turned in this direction. It's very strange!"

The more Dick thought about it the more uncomfortable he felt.

A kind of nameless fear came creeping slowly over him, until it obtained entire possession of his faculties.

It was then that he reached the summit of the hill.

A glorious sight indeed lay before him.

For miles and miles a most beautiful landscape could be beheld—a landscape only dotted here and there with trees, and for the most part composed of meadows, which displayed every shade of green.

But this prospect, although so magnificent, was unheeded by the highwayman, upon whose countenance an expression of amazement—not to say horror—gradually settled.

And no wonder, for neither down the broad high-road which he could see extending far below the bottom of the hill, nor in the meadows on either side of it, could he perceive the least trace of his comrades.

He rubbed his eyes, and began to wonder whether he was really in his right senses.

But, so far as he could judge, everything around bore an accustomed and natural aspect.

Where, then, had his comrades gone?

Most certainly not down the high-road. Upon that point there could not possibly be two opinions, for such was its length that they had not had sufficient time to reach the bottom even if they had urged their horses to the utmost gallop, which was an unlikely thing for them to do, in consequence of the precipitous character of the descent.

Neither had they leaped over any of the hedges, for the smooth meadows offered no concealment whatever, and had they done so Dick must infallibly have perceived them.

The longer he stood on the brow of the hill, and the more he comprehended all these circumstances, the more did his wonder increase.

He was not more certain of his own existence than he was that he had seen Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack only a few fleeting moments ago occupying the very space of ground on which he now stood.

Now the keenest and most piercing eye would altogether have failed in describing them anywhere.

There were no hiding-places anywhere near.

The smooth, velvet-like pasture-land was not broken anywhere by so much as a furrow.

They were not concealed behind any hedgerow, for these were all unusually low and bare of leaves, so that it was easy to see completely through them.

As the mystery of his friends' disappearance increased, a cold, uncomfortable feeling spread itself all over Dick's frame, and he felt as though some icy object had been placed in contact with his heart.

There was only one conclusion that he could adopt that offered anything approaching to a solution of this mysterious affair, and that conclusion Dick was most reluctant to adopt, though, in a manner of speaking, he was driven to it.

The beings he had seen upon the summit of the hill were not of this earth, they were not living creatures of

dash and blood like himself, but unsubstantial phantoms.

Had they not been, how could they possibly have so completely disappeared in such a brief space of time?

CHAPTER CMXVI.

IN WHICH DICK FINDS HIS PERILS AND PERPLEXITIES INCREASING.

DICK TURPIN pulled off his hat and wiped away the cold, death-like drops of perspiration that had gathered there upon his brow.

He looked around him, but he saw nothing but what served to make him feel more convulsively than ever that he had met with a supernatural adventure.

And what could so strange, so unparalleled an event portend?

Was it the precursor of danger to himself, or of peril to his comrades?

He doubted not there was some good reason why he had thus so suddenly and strangely been brought face to face with two of his companions.

But what the reason was baffled him entirely.

If he had chosen to interpret it as the harbinger of peril to himself he would have appeared to be correct, for now, as his eyes wandered along the broad level high-road, he caught sight of a body of police officers, who evidently were riding forward at the best speed they could make.

Dick quitted his exposed situation at once, and with all his faculties aroused by this fresh danger he debated within himself which would be the best course for him now to adopt.

In the space of a few minutes the officers would arrive at the top of the hill. What, then, should he do in the meantime?

Flight was out of the question; he felt that so conclusively that he abandoned the idea almost as soon as it was formed.

With such a miserable horse as he now possessed, the police officers would have no trouble in overtaking him, nor would he have the least chance if he trusted to his own fleetness of foot.

He could think of no other course that offered the slightest chance of safety save that of endeavouring to assume with what perfection he could the character he had undertaken to play.

Accordingly, carefully placing his hat once more upon his head, he took his seat in front of the cart.

Then he urged his horse onward, hoping that he might pass through the ranks of the officers without danger.

This, however, was a hope scarcely to be indulged in.

The disguise had already served him well on many occasions, but then that was during the night, and many things which pass muster in an artificial light would be instantly detected by day.

The question was, then, would the officers look so particularly at him or take so much notice of him as he drove quietly past as to penetrate his disguise.

He could only trust not, and drive quietly on.

This course he carried out, hanging his head down upon his breast and appearing as if half asleep.

Furtively, however, from time to time he glanced at the officers, who were now very close at hand indeed, but not so close as he had anticipated, for they had reduced their speed.

They were permitting their exhausted horses to ascend the hill at a walking pace.

The officers were talking. Dick could hear their voices floating distinctly on the still, calm morning air.

Another moment and he was able to tell the precise words they made use of.

"As I live," said one of them, "it's the same rascal! I'll swear to him and his bruv' on four legs at any minute."

"And I'll swear to the cart," said another.

"Curse his impudence," added a third. "I firmly believe he sent us out of our way on purpose. If I only felt sure of it he should pay dearly for the act."

"Rely upon it it was done on purpose," said another.

"Tom King would very likely throw him a guinea and bid him be silent—at any rate, let us take him in custody."

"Agreed—seize him at once—we'll have a prisoner of some sort. I am determined not to have all my night's work for nothing!"

It was the police officer in command who spoke these last words.

Can anyone form a remote idea of the state of Dick Turpin's mind as he overheard this conversation?

There was no time left for him to act or even to think; the officers were now close upon him, and several of them, spurring their horses, dashed forward, and in a moment surrounded the cart.

One and all drew their pistols, presenting them full at Dick's head, while another saved him the trouble of stopping the horse by seizing hold of the bridle.

The cart came to a standstill.

Dick looked up in well-affected amazement.

It was a bold thing for him to do, but he did it, for he had a reason.

The officers saw his face, but they failed to recognise him.

"Surrender," they cried—"you are our prisoner!"

"P—p—prisoner?" said Dick, stammeringly, and pretending to tremble with fright.

"Yes; and now surrender! If you resist, you are a dead man!"

Resistance indeed was vain, and Dick did not attempt it; but with a wonderful coolness and presence of mind he continued to act in accordance with his assumed character.

"B—but, gentlemen," he said, touching his hat at every word—"gentlemen all, what have I done? I haven't been stealing."

"No, you have not been stealing," was the answer; "but you recollect us, don't you—you remember when you saw us before?"

"Yes—yes; Captain was down."

"Yes; and you gave us false information as to the road the highwayman took. That's felony, and you shall be punished for it! Come down off your perch; we'll have the darbies on you in a jiffy!"

Dick hesitated, and pretended to do so from fright; but it was in order to decide upon his next actions.

Clearly he could not better his situation by remaining where he was; and therefore, slowly and reluctantly, and with many expressions of terror and shakes of the head, he clumsily got up, and as clumsily began to descend from his vehicle.

But the officers were impatient, and seizing him rudely, pulled him down into the road. Then, with great expertness, one of them clapped the handcuffs over his wrists.

So suddenly was this done, that even Dick was taken at unawares.

He had not quite made up his mind whether he should submit to being handcuffed or not.

Now it was too late; his wrists were fast.

The officer evidently thought he had performed a very clever, dexterous feat, for he laughed exultingly as he said:

"There, now, my fine fellow, what do you think of that? How do you feel now?"

Dick pretended to cry.

"Let me off," he said—"oh, do let me off, and I will do anything you like! I did tell you wrong, I know I did; but, then, I was afraid I should have my brains blown out!"

"Eh? What?" said the chief officer, at this moment.

"Why were you afraid of that?"

"Why—why, air, if you please," said Dick, "if you will only let me off, I will tell you the whole truth."

"Well, well, tell it."

"But will you let me off afterwards?"

"Silence!" said the officer who stood next to him, accompanying the words with such a thump, that Dick felt as though all the breath was suddenly jerked out of his body—"silence! What do you mean by speaking like that? Mind your manners."

Dick pretended to be still more humble and contrite.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said—"very sorry, but I was mortally frightened!"

"Who by? Why don't you tell all, as you promised?"

"Well, so I will, your worship. You must understand when that fellow came galloping along, he saw me in the cart, and he pulled up all of a sudden like."

"Yes, yes."

"Then he swore an awful oath, and he said that the grabs was behind, and swore again that if I so much as opened my mouth to say which way he had gone, he would certainly find it out, and blow my brains out, if it was a year to come. He looked at me, and said he should know me again."

"And so, on those grounds, you gave us false information, eh?" said the police officer.

"Yes, yes, I have."

"Well, then, my fine fellow, you have been clever enough to admit your guilt; and let me tell you all you have just said will be used against you in evidence. You heard me give the caution, of course?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the officers, in chorus, though a word in the shape of caution had been spoken.

"But won't you let me off?" said Dick, more ruefully than ever. "I have told you the truth. Why don't you let me off?"

"We'll let you off this far," said the officer, with a wink: "We'll carry you straight before Squire Bartlett, who lives near at hand, and he will take charge of you. We would take you with us to London, only we have more important matters on hand."

Dick Turpin put in a wild, incoherent, terrified appeal. It produced no effect whatever upon the officers.

They were, indeed, without exception, quite rejoiced to think that they had succeeded in making a prisoner of some sort or other. It consoled them, in a very great measure, for the disappointment they had experienced throughout the night.

CHAPTER CMXVII.

DICK TURPIN IS CARRIED BEFORE SQUIRE BARTLETT, AND COMMITTED.

EVEN in such a perilous and trying position as this, Dick was able to find some slight amount of consolation, although it was so slight that probably anyone else would have passed it over altogether.

But he had heard the officers express their intention of not taking him to London, but simply of conducting him before some country justice of the peace.

He was very careful, however, not to allow any signs of the satisfaction this afforded him to appear in his countenance, lest this should arouse the now dormant suspicions of his captors.

Indeed, he was not a little amazed himself to discover that his disguise stood such close scrutiny.

He had not dared to hope that the result would prove so favourable. On the contrary, he had made up his mind that his detection would follow as a matter of course.

The chief reason, however, why he was not recognised consisted in the fact that the officers' minds were fully impressed with the idea that he was a carter and nothing else.

They had seen him on a preceding occasion going towards London, and now they met him returning, and to all appearance quite unconcerned.

That this could be Dick Turpin was an idea so monstrous and extravagant that it never for one moment crossed their minds; indeed, it may be safely said it would be the very last thing they would think of.

And so, as it never occurred to them to suspect that the carter was not what he professed to be, Dick stood in slight danger of discovery now.

The only thing that would betray him would be any forgetfulness or oversight on his part.

If for one moment he spoke in his own natural voice, detection would follow.

In a matter of this kind, however, Dick was not likely to be careless; and, moreover, the character he was playing was the one of all others which he could sustain with the best ability, for during his early life he had lived far in the country, and had had daily opportunities of noting the peculiarities of the labouring man.

Accordingly, although the eyes of so many of his enemies were directed upon him, Dick Turpin was unknown.

The residence of the squire they had mentioned was very close at hand—indeed, almost in sight of where they stood, and towards it they now made their way.

The horse and cart were also valiantly taken prisoner and led along towards the justice's.

Many were the jokes made and laughs raised at Dick's expense, but he showed no signs of merriment or resentment on his countenance.

He kept up a perpetual appeal to be let off, alleging various reasons for not being brought before the squire.

To all of these the officers turned a deaf ear, though they served them as materials for sport.

At length, breasting the hill, Dick looked around, and perceived a large, substantially-built white mansion, situated very pleasantly upon the declivity of the hill.

This he doubted not was the residence of Squire Bartlett, and he shortly after found that his conjecture was quite correct.

Although the hour was such an early one, wreaths of smoke could be seen curling from some of the chimneys, and the officers noted this with great satisfaction.

As the distance was not great, and all the way downhill, it was soon performed.

They clamoured loudly at the lodge gates, and were admitted.

While the little procession made its way up the winding avenue leading to the house, Dick's reflections were by no means of a pleasant character.

He was as yet not very far from London, and it was quite possible that this country justice might by his inquiries find out that he was only disguised, or he might be clever enough to recognise him.

At any rate, Dick felt that he had an ordeal of no trifling kind to pass through.

But he endeavoured to nerve himself for it as best he could.

The officers made their way round to the back of the house, and, after much knocking, were admitted into a kind of court-yard.

Here they alighted from their steeds, and a few servants, who were up at that early hour, issued from various doors, all filled with curiosity to know the meaning of this strange arrival.

"Is his worship here?" asked the officer in command.

"Yes," replied the servant he addressed.

"Then tell him he's wanted immediately."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"He's in bed."

"Well, wake him."

"It's more than my read's worth, or yours either."

"Pooh, pooh—nonsense—nothing of the kind!" said the officer. "We have a prisoner of great importance, and it is necessary that he should be examined without delay, so call his worship up at once! Say I am here—Davis, the police officer from London."

At this moment one of the upper windows was thrown open with great violence, and a nightcapped head appeared.

"Oh, law!" exclaimed the servant—"there's his worship! Now there'll be a row!"

"Hallo—hallo!" said the justice, in very gruff, choleric tones—"what's the meaning of this infernal row at this hour in the morning? I'll have you all committed to prison! Be off—be off at once!"

"Your worship," said the officer in command, taking off his hat, and speaking with great respect, "I am very sorry to disturb you, but I have a prisoner here of very great importance indeed, and I want you to order him into safe custody."

"Ouu, tlee! You must wait till twelve o'clock!"

"But it's impossible, your worship!" said the police officer. "We are in pursuit of Tom King and we charge this man here with being his accomplice, for he gave us false information during the night."

"Tom King, did you say?" said the justice.

"Yes, the notorious highwayman!"

"Catch him, then—catch him! I'll add fifty pounds to the reward myself! O—on the fellow's impudence—he robbed a sister of mine in a stage-coach some time ago! Wait a minute, and I will be with you. Go into the justicing-room."

The squire, now all alive, withdrew himself from the window, and the servants, having heard his words, no longer scrupled to show the officers the way to the justicing-room.

This was a large empty apartment on the ground floor of the mansion, that had about as cheerless a look as any room well could.

A rude table was placed on a raised platform at one end and above that was a large arm-chair.

Some little delay took place; but by the time the officers had settled themselves in this apartment, the magistrate, with his nightcap on, and wrapped up in a dressing-gown of an alarming pattern, stalked in, and took his seat in the arm-chair already mentioned.

"Where is this fellow?" he said. "Oh, there he is! Why, I can see what he's capable of with half an eye. Where's my clerk? Not here, of course. I'll discharge him. Mr. Officer!"

"Yes, your worship."

"I'll commit him—I'll commit him at once. I'll write out the committal now, and you can have him locked up in the cage and kept safe."

"But—but," said Dick, playing his part still with admiration—"but—but, your worship, I told him the truth, all about it, and he said—"

"Silence, you ruffian!" bawled the justice. "How dare you interrupt the proceedings in the court? What's your villainous name? Speak the truth, now!"

"What's your name?" said the officer who stood nearest to Dick, and who, while he spoke, gave him a tremendous smack on his back. "Why don't you speak when his worship speaks to you?"

Dick's fingers instinctively curled up, and he felt the greatest disposition in the world to knock the officer down.

But with a great effort he controlled this impulse, and after much stammering and stuttering, said:

"John."

"John—John," said the magistrate—"of course his name's John, and Smith's his other name, or if it isn't it'd do as well as any. There you are. Lock him up;—d—n him, it's like his impudence, to fetch a justice out of bed at this hour in the morning, when there are no fires alight, and disturbing his rest. But wait till the rascal comes before me again—I'll let him know what's what!"

And with this vague threat the magistrate put a paper into the officer's hand, upon which was scrawled some words that would have puzzled a lawyer to decipher, and having done so, he made his retreat in a very hasty and undignified manner.

Dick was perfectly amazed at the manner in which the proceedings were carried on, and wondered whether that was the way in which the squire generally meted out justice.

He was not allowed much opportunity for speculating on this or any other topic, for the officers proceeded to hustle him off.

"What are you going to do? Where are you going to take me? Didn't I promise to tell you the truth, and haven't I done so?"

"Oh, stop your row!" said the chief officer—"we have wasted too much time already. Come on—you will soon know what we intend to do with you."

CHAPTER CMXVIII.

DICK SCRAPIN IS HANDED OVER TO THE CUSTODY OF THE PARISH CONSTABLE AND HIS ASSISTANT.

With these words, the police officer very unceremoniously bundled Dick out of the justicing-room, and, after traversing several other apartments and a corridor, reached at length the yard, where the horses were waiting.

By the directions of their chief, the officers mounted—all save two, who placed themselves on each side of the prisoner.

In this manner they commenced their march, Dick wondering to what sort of a place of confinement they would consign him.

He was not kept very long in doubt, for, going down a narrow, winding lane that skirted a large and dense preserve, they came all at once upon a sleepy-looking little village that was entirely shut in from observation on one side by the sloping hill, and on the other by the preserve just mentioned.

On that clear, sunshiny morning, however, almost

every place looked beautiful, and in particular this little village looked charming.

Early as was the hour, the inhabitants were or the most part astir, and the unusual fact of the approach of a body of horsemen quickly became known, so that by the time the first house in the village was reached quite a large crowd had assembled to greet them.

All looked inquiringly upon the officers and their prisoner, but did not venture to make any remark.

The chief officer, however, in a loud voice called out for the parish constable, and as soon as the words were pronounced a little fat man came bustling through the crowd, and rummaging with his hand in one of his coat pockets as he did so.

The reason for this quickly became apparent, for, withdrawing his hand, he produced a little black staff about eight inches in length, with a gilt crown on the top of it, which was the badge of his authority and office.

"Here I am," he said—"here I am, at your service."

"We have a prisoner here," said the chief officer, "who has been duly committed by the squire, and he must be looked after with particular care and attention. We give him into your charge."

"All right," said the constable, with a pompous air—"all right! I will take care of him, never fear. But what a desperate-looking character he is!"

"Yes—you had better be careful. Shall you take him single-handed?"

"No, no—not if I know it!" cried the constable, and, as he spoke, he faced round and continued: "Simon—Simon, you rascal, where have you got to this blessed morning? Simon, I say! Curse you, you are always out of the way when you're wanted!"

These words caused a rather singular-looking individual to thrust himself prominently forward.

It was no other than the parish constable's factotum and general assistant—a tall, loose-jointed fellow, neither a man nor a boy, with a vacant, silly expression on his face, and a tremendous shock of uncombed hair.

But although his appearance did not give him credit for it, yet he was, nevertheless, possessed of a very unusual amount of strength, and therefore the parish constable was always anxious to have him at hand when it was necessary to make any capture.

Dick was now pushed forward by the police officers, and given into the charge of the constable and Simon.

Little did they think, as they performed this act, how great a prize they were allowing to slip out of their fingers.

"Now," said the one in command, "Mr. Constable, bear in mind that we have delivered him to you safe and sound, and you will be answerable for his re-appearance at the proper moment. Forward, my lads!" he added—"we are not yet too late to continue our pursuit."

With these words, the officers departed, in order to continue their search for Tom King, leaving a much more valuable prize behind, and, as one might almost say, unguarded.

Dick watched the departure of the police officers with anxious eyes.

He could scarcely bring himself to believe in the occurrences of the last hour.

Indeed, from the time when he had seen his two comrades so suddenly and mysteriously appear upon the summit of the hill, he had appeared to be in a dream.

"Now then, you low-lived, ill-brought-up-looking wretch," said the constable, addressing his prisoner—"what are you staring for like that? Come along, can't you? Oh, you won't? Then take that!"

No, it must not be understood, from any portion of this speech, that Dick in any way refused to comply with the constable's injunctions; but that functionary wished to make some display of his power; so, when he bade Dick take that, he struck him a sharp blow with the crown of his staff.

Dick felt the greatest inclination to knock the fellow down, but it was not his policy to maintain too aggressive an attitude against this man, for already the highwayman had decided upon the course of action he should adopt.

But he could not resist suddenly snatching the little staff out of the constable's hand and throwing it to some distance, although the feat was rendered difficult from

the fact that the handcuffs were still about his wrists.

The constable stood white and shaking with rage at the commission of so dreadful an act.

To his mind, it was little short of sacrilege.

The staff, after describing many eccentric curves in the air, fell at last in the middle of a huge, slime-covered pond, and was immediately lost to view.

"Murder!" gasped the constable. "Seize him, Simon! Hold him—hold him tight! The world is coming to an end! He has insulted the King through me, his Majesty's unworthy representative!"

"Yes, decidedly unworthy," said Dick, at which words there was a general laugh among the villagers assembled.

"Bring him along, Simon!" roared the constable, as soon as he could make himself heard—"bring him along—I will not dally another moment!"

"Now, look here, Simon," said Dick—"just say which way you want me to go, and I will obey; but don't you try to haul me along, or you will find you have an ugly customer to deal with."

Simon fully appreciated the force of these remarks, so he made a sign for Dick to follow.

The trio then marched along up the village street, the people following and pressing round, and the constable giving vent to such vague threats as—

"I'll make it hot for you, my fine fellow—I'll let you know the consequences of insulting me! The institutions of this country are not to be overturned by a scoundrel like you! But you shall suffer for it; you shall know what it is to be a day and a night in my charge!"

To these speeches Dick paid not the least attention.

He heard them, it is true, but his mind was busy with other matters.

Chiefly he was curious to know where his captors were going to lead him, and he looked piercingly in advance, hoping to catch an early sight of his destination.

From the constable and the other people of the village Dick felt he had little to fear in the way of recognition, although he made up his mind not to relax his caution to too great an extent.

To his surprise, the long, straggling street of the village was quite passed through; and as he looked along the road before him, he could perceive only one building, and that looked more like a huge summer-house than aught else.

About a hundred yards or so beyond this was a toll-bar.

Quickly became apparent that this summer-house-looking building was the destination of the constable; and on drawing closer to it, Dick perceived it was the village cage, or round-house, where offenders against the laws were temporarily confined.

Dick's lips curled in derision when he found he was about to be committed to such a place.

Although handcuffed, he felt there would be little difficulty in forcing his way out of it.

By the instructions of the constable, Simon drew forth a huge bunch of keys, and, selecting one key larger than the rest, he opened the door of the round-house.

"The blunderbuss," he said—"bring out the blunderbuss!"

At these words there was a general retrogressive movement on the part of the crowd.

Simon entered the little building, and quickly appeared with the weapon in question.

It was a huge, clumsy looking affair, and seemed as though it had been many centuries ago by some inmate of the village.

The barrel was, as usual, of brass, but the bore was suggestive of that of a cannon, while the bell-shaped mouth was as large as an ordinary basin.

Dick looked with alarm at this instrument of destruction—not that he feared much from being fired at with it, but from his idea of the awful consequences that must ensue to the person who was foolhardy enough to pull the trigger.

"Is it loaded, Simon?" said the constable.

"Yea, sir, it is loaded. I loaded it yesterday."

"Well, then, just put these in additional, will you?"

And as he spoke, the constable pulled out of his pocket

a handful of nails, which he poured at once into the capacious mouth of the blunderbuss.

They were then rammed tightly down, and the constable, continuing his instructions, said:

"Push him inside, Simon, and shut the door. Then sit down here on the edge of the stocks, and keep watch. If he attempts to escape—mark you, if he only attempts—don't wait for orders to blaze away!"

CHAPTER CMXIX.

DICK TURPIN IS SECURELY LODGED IN THE VILLAGE CAGE, AND SIMON KEEPS GOOD GUARD WITH THE BLUNDERBUSS.

SIMON handled the blunderbuss very carefully, and before venturing to carry into execution that portion of the constable's command which related to pushing the prisoner into the round-house and locking the door, he lodged the clumsy, awe-inspiring firearm against one of the upright posts of the stocks which were placed facing the road and a little on one side of the cage.

"Understand," said Dick again, when Simon came towards him, "I will not suffer myself to be handled by anyone! If you want me to go inside, just say so."

Simon stood aside, and waved his hand.

"In with him," shouted the constable—"in with him! Why don't you bundle him in, you lazy varlet? Do you think I want to stand here all the morning?"

"I am going, Mr. Constable," said Dick—"I am going. But surely you are not in earnest in telling Simon to fire off that blunderbuss?"

"In earnest?" repeated the constable. "Of course I'm in earnest! What else should I be, let me ask you?"

"Well, then, if Simon has any respect for his life he won't do it. I'd lay a wager that the moment the trigger is pulled it will burst, and be blown into a thousand pieces."

"Pooh, pooh—that's no business of yours! In with him, Simon—in with him, I say!"

Dick walked quietly to the door of the round-house, for he did not want to draw down upon himself any more of the public attention than he could possibly avoid.

It was plain, however, to see that his words had produced some impression upon Simon, for that individual eyed the blunderbuss apparently with anything but comfortable feelings.

No sooner had Dick crossed the threshold than the door was slammed shut and the key turned in the lock.

At first he could scarcely make out what kind of place he was in, owing to the semi-darkness.

But his nose was assailed by a most powerful and disagreeable odour, showing that the constable and his assistant were by no means careful to keep the cage as clean as it might be.

Indeed Dick's whole attention when he first entered this place was occupied in listening to what was said outside.

"Don't you mind what that fellow says about the blunderbuss," cried the constable; "it's all right. He only said that to frighten you. He's a desperate character. There's only half an ounce of powder in it, and a quarter of a pound of duck shot. And, mark you, if he tries to get out, you pull the trigger, and never mind the consequences; but if he does escape, I'll have you taken up before his worship, and you shall be transported."

This threat appeared to produce a considerable effect upon Simon.

There were some chinks in the woodwork of which the cage was composed, and Dick had found one of them, to which he applied his eye.

He could obtain a partial view of what was going on outside.

He saw Simon walk slowly towards the stocks, with something of the air of a man who is walking to his execution.

Then he beheld him pick up the blunderbuss, seat himself on a portion of the wooden frame, and there remain on guard.

"Don't you move," said the constable—"don't you move, on any account, until I come back to you and give you leave."



[DICK TURPIN LOOKS SIMON AND THE BEADLE IN THE CAGE.]

Simon did not make any verbal reply, but sat still, looking very stupid and foolish.

"Do you hear what I say?" roared the constable, for his temper had been greatly tried that morning.

"Yes, I can hear right enough."

"Well, then, why don't you say so?"

Simon was again silent.

"Understand distinctly," continued the constable, purposely raising his voice that it might reach the ears of the prisoner within the cage, "if he so much as show the tip of his nose in the attempt to escape, shoot him down like you would a crow."

"But—but—" said Simon, hesitatingly.

"But what?"

"Suppose I killed him?"

"Well, then he will be a good riddance—that's all in say."

"But shan't I be had up for it?"

No. 188.—BLACK BESS.

"No—certainly not. You have my authority. He's been duly warned of the consequences, and if he attempts to escape, why, the consequences will be on his own head. I'm off now," the constable added; "and mind that you keep a good guard during my absence."

With these words, the constable turned round and marched away.

Several of the villagers accompanied him, of course anxious to draw him into conversation respecting the events of the morning.

Others less anxious in this respect, but more so in another, lingered around the cage, looking at Simon with admiring eyes, but keeping a safe distance from the blunderbuss, the effects of an explosion of which they justly dreaded.

At last, however, these villagers, one by one, dispersed; there did not seem to be one thorough idler among the group—all had their work to do.

And so in a short time they took their departure, and Simon was left alone.

He watched the last until he had disappeared from sight; then, with an audible sigh, he placed the blunderbuss carefully against the upright post of the stocks, and assumed a very hopeless, dejected attitude.

It was clear that he was by no means pleased with his duty; but he had no means of escape from it.

Dick continued to watch him through the crevice for several moments, and then, turning round, he gazed about him, anxious to make himself acquainted with his prison.

The interior of the round-house was now much more clearly discernible than when he first entered it, for his eyes had accustomed themselves to the very small amount of light which crept in.

Nothing more cheerless, desolate, and disgusting could be imagined.

The village pound was not in a worse condition, and that was saying a good deal.

There was no seat in the place, and nothing that would serve as one.

The walls, though not very stout and strong, were, nevertheless, smooth.

The top was formed merely of thatch, so that, but for the presence of Simon and the blunderbuss outside, it would have been no difficult matter to escape.

This last word was continually before his mind, and, having made himself as familiar as he wished to be with the inside of the round-house, he turned his back to the wall. Selecting the cleanest place he could find, and leaning against it, he supported himself by driving his heels into the thick clayey mud which formed the flooring.

Here he gave himself up to thought, wondering which would be the best means of achieving his freedom.

After all, he thought Simon was not a man to be particularly dreaded.

There would be a risk in attempting to break forth, but at Dick Turpin thought it might be run successfully. Ten to one if the fellow would have the courage or presence of mind to discharge the blunderbuss at the right moment, or, if he did, it would be without an aim.

But another consideration suggested itself, which made Dick quite unwilling to run this risk.

The blunderbuss would certainly be fired, and if he should be so fortunate as to escape any injury from the various missiles it contained, the explosion, nevertheless, would resound far and wide through the still, quiet air, and spread an immediate alarm.

Before he should be able to get to any great distance there was a strong probability of his being overtaken and recaptured.

"No," said Dick, after debating the subject at great length—"no, I will not run the risk just at present. I will wait. Perhaps fortune will favour me—who knows?"

Dick's resolution was to stay till nightfall, which certainly would afford him a better chance of making his escape, though there was the fear that he might not be allowed to remain so long in his present quarters.

That was a chance, and a chance he resolved it should remain.

And now, in the silence and solitude of this place, he began for the first time to give himself up to a little calm reflection.

Instantaneously his thoughts travelled back to the time when that singular incident had befallen him at the summit of the hill.

The more he pondered upon this, the more at a loss he felt to comprehend it.

The most reasonable conclusion he could come to was that he had seen was a delusion of the senses merely; but, then, the forms of his two comrades looked so palpable and plain that he could scarcely reconcile himself to this belief.

And so, with his mind in a state of great uneasiness and alarm, Dick slowly passed the day.

About noon the constable made his appearance, bringing with him some dinner for Simon.

Then Dick learned that Squire Bartlett was unable to attend to his magisterial functions that day, in consequence of a hunting appointment he had with several gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

Dick heard this intelligence with the greatest satisfaction.

"Are you sure he's all right?" asked the constable.

"Well, I think he is," said Simon. "But since the door was closed, I have not heard him move."

"That's only his artfulness," said the constable. "I've had some experience with men of his stamp, and know how to deal with them. He wants taming a little, and I calculate hunger will do it."

After a few more words, the constable took his departure, and Simon was once more left alone.

Dick had now decided upon the pursuit of a definite course of action, which he hoped would result in his perfect freedom.

Whether it would do so or not depended upon various contingencies; but he had great hopes.

His first task was to rid himself of the handcuffs, which galled and chafed him exceedingly.

He had made many and continual efforts to accomplish this, but to no purpose.

Now, however, with stern, angry determination, he set about it, resolved to endure any amount of pain in order to get his hands at liberty.

Squeezing his left hand, which was rather less than his right, into the smallest possible dimensions, he began to tug with might and main in order to get it through the strong steel hoop.

In the effort, the skin was torn from the back of his hand in long strips.

The pain was intense; but, clenching his teeth together, he persevered, for he felt each time his hand was drawn further and further through the ring.

At last he was free, so far as riding his left hand of the handcuff was concerned.

He had not time to liberate his right, for he knew that for a time the manacle hooped about it would offer him but slight inconvenience.

Now that he had done so much towards the accomplishment of his design, he became exceedingly impatient for night to close in.

It was some comfort for him to think that it was that season of the year when darkness sets in early.

By slow degrees, the interior of his prison could be less and less distinctly perceived; but when darkness fairly settled around, Dick made no immediate attempt at liberation.

He was waiting for the chance to present itself of leaving the round-house quietly and speedily.

It required a great effort of self-control to remain thus idle when he might be taking steps to quit the cage.

But his long and weary waiting was rewarded at last.

The sound of a voice from the distance, and then the heavy tread of some one approaching, roused all his faculties.

Again applying his eyes to the crevice in the wood-work, he looked forth, and saw, at some distance, a small, flickering light.

It grew brighter and clearer, for it was coming closer.

Then he perceived the bulky figure of the constable approaching.

He was carrying a lantern in his hand, and it was from this the light proceeded.

Simon gave utterance to a responsive shout.

He was glad enough to see his master approaching, for the solitude in which he had so long remained had become almost insupportable.

"All's well, Simon, eh?" said the constable, when he got a little nearer.

"Yes, all's well," was the answer, very sulkily given—"at least, I suppose all's well."

"Why suppose?"

"Because I've not heard a single sound since I saw you last, and I can hardly bring myself to believe that he is in the cage at all."

"Why—why—what you don't mean to say that—that—"

"That what?"

"That he's escaped?"

"No, no—I don't believe he has," said Simon. "I have never took my eyes off the building for a blessed minute."

The account given by his factotum by no means pleased or reassured the constable.

He was very anxious to make certain that his prisoner was safe.

He had received a message from the squire, bidding him bring the prisoner before him and two other magistrates at noon on the morrow, and he had heard quite enough to be aware that the magistrate had a personal feeling in the matter.

In these parts the squire was absolute, and knowing his power made the constable exceedingly anxious that all should go well with the prisoner, of whom, it need scarcely be stated, he stood in great dread.

Some time elapsed, during which he remained in deep reflection.

Dick's breath came short and fast.

He wondered whether the chance he had hoped for and calculated upon was really about to present itself.

"Ain't you going to let me go home?" said Simon, at last, breaking in upon his superior's meditation. "I am cold through to the bone, and if I stop here much longer I shall go to sleep!"

"You had better not!" said the constable. "But I'll tell you what you shall do. You shall take my lantern, and I will take the blunderbuss, and you shall open the door of the cage, and peep in to see whether the prisoner is all right."

But Simon did not relish this proposal.

"And where shall you be?" he ventured to ask.

"Why, keeping guard outside here, you idiot!" was the reply. "If he attempts to escape, why, pop! and down he goes!"

"I don't like to go in by myself in the dark," said Simon. "I am frightened."

"It won't be in the dark."

"Yes it will!"

"How can it be, if you take the lantern with you?"

"Well, that makes no difference. And I'll tell you what it is," said Simon, with sudden boldness, "I ain't going in by myself, and that's a fact!"

The constable seemed about to break forth into some ebullition of rage; but, if so, he controlled the impulse.

"Don't be a fool, Simon," he said—"don't be a fool! You have nothing whatever to fear. Take the lantern, and walk in boldly."

"Not first," said Simon, more doggedly than before—"not first. Arter you, if you please."

CHAPTER CMXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN, THE PARISH CONSTABLE, AND SIMON CHANGE PLACES.

THE constable hesitated a moment or two, and it was about an even chance whether the door of the cage would be opened at all that night or not.

The desire to ascertain whether his prisoner was safe, however, overcame every other consideration in his breast, especially when he remembered how serious the consequences would be to him should an escape take place.

Sinking his voice, he continued:

"I really think he is a dangerous fellow, Simon; but two of us needn't be afraid of him. Look here, we'll both go together, and take one peep to ascertain that he is all safe, and then we'll lock the door again."

"That's more reasonable," said Simon—"a good deal more reasonable, and I don't mind it."

The matter being thus arranged, the constable took up the blunderbuss, and Simon took the lantern.

The pair of them, advancing a few steps, stopped before the door.

The key was thrust into the lock, and turned.

At this moment a faint, smothered cry, sounding like a groan, came to their ears.

It made both of them start with affright.

The constable trembled from head to foot, and even his very lips turned white as he ejaculated:

"Why, what was that, Simon—what was that?"

"Blest if I know! Have you got the blunderbuss?"

"Yes—yes."

"On full cock?"

"Yes—yes."

"Mercy!" said a faint voice. "Have pity upon me!"

If you have any feelings of compassion, don't allow me to perish here in this manner!"

"Why—why, Simon——"

"Yes, master?"

"It sounds as if he was uncommonly bad—don't it?"

"Oh, very!"

"Just push the door open a little further, and poke the lantern in. Don't be frightened. I'll stand behind you with the blunderbuss. I'll keep him back, I'll warrant!"

Simon was rather curious to know what was the matter with the prisoner, and his curiosity enabled him to some extent to overget his fears.

Thrusting in the lantern as he had been directed, he bent forward and glanced around the interior of the cage.

"Well—well," said the constable, anxiously, vainly endeavouring, by standing on tip-toe, to peep over his factotum's shoulder, "can you see him?"

"Yes, master. I can see him plain enough."

"Where is he?"

"He do seem uncommonly bad, to be sure."

"But where is he, I say?"

"Lying on his blessed back, master—flat on his back, and he looks to me as if he was about to kick the bucket."

"But he mustn't," said the constable—"but he mustn't!"

"Have pity," said Dick, again, in a weak voice—"do have pity upon me! Help me, or I shall surely die!"

"But you mustn't!" roared the constable.

Dick responded with a groan.

"I wonder what's the matter with him, master?" asked Simon.

"I don't know. What's to be done?"

Simon scratched his head, but did not reply.

He's handcuffed—yes, he's handcuffed, and there are two of us, and we've got the blunderbuss," pursued the constable, with more determination in his voice and manner. "We oughtn't to be afraid, eh, Simon?"

"No—no"

"We ought to be a match for him. The only thing I wish is, that it was a little lighter—I don't like the dark."

At this moment, Dick renewed his appeal for assistance, and, judging by the tone of his voice and the manner in which he was lying on the ground, it would appear that he was very bad indeed.

The motionless manner in which he continued to remain served to inspire the constable and Simon with courage.

They began to think there would surely not be so much danger after all in venturing into the round-house in order to see what really was the matter with the prisoner.

Accordingly, after much hesitation, and taking their steps in such a manner that they seemed half inclined to turn round and run away again, they approached the spot where Dick was lying.

"What's the matter?" said the constable, more boldly, and grasping the blunderbuss while he spoke—"what's the matter? What do you want?"

"Oh dear—oh dear!"

"Don't speak and look like that. Why don't you say what's the matter?"

Dick groaned.

"Oh!" he said—"oh, if I could only get up just a very little! I fancy I should be better then!"

"And why don't you get up?"

"I—I can't; but I will try."

Apparently with great pain and difficulty, Dick slowly raised himself from the ground.

Simon, holding the lantern in his hand, looked on with the deepest interest, and the constable—who, prudently or otherwise, had got behind Simon—peeped furtively first from one side, then from the other.

All at once, however, with the suddenness of a lightning's flash, Dick started up.

No movement could possibly have been made more rapid; but the fact was, he had been careful to get in such a position first that he could spring to his feet without difficulty.

In doing so, he gave Simon a tremendous push, which

he could scarcely have withstood even had he been on his guard and prepared for it.

But, taking him unawares as it did, he went back as though shot.

The constable was behind him, and was, if possible, still more taken by surprise—in fact, before he knew what had happened, or how it had come to pass, he found himself lying on his back on the muddy floor of the cage, with Simon struggling on the top of him.

Neither did he know how or by what means the trigger of the blunderbuss was pulled; certainly the weapon exploded with tremendous violence, lighting up for a moment the whole interior of the cage with a vivid glare, and then, with a crashing sound, the various missiles with which it had been loaded went hurtling through the thatch-covered roof.

After that there was silence and darkness.

With the same quick movement, Dick, finding his *ruse* so successful, had darted to the door, which the constable had left ajar.

The key was sticking in the lock.

Quick as thought, he closed the door and turned the key.

The tables were then turned; he was no longer the prisoner, but the jailer.

The noise made by the report of the blunderbuss could not fail, he felt sure, to reach the ears of the inmates of the village, and set them all on the alert.

It was necessary, then, for him to make his escape with all speed.

Yet, though aware of this, Dick could not resist the temptation of waiting to ascertain what had been the effects of the explosion of the blunderbuss.

Accordingly he tapped sharply with his knuckles upon the door of the round-house as he cried:

"Mr. Constable—Mr. Constable! Simon—Simon!"

Rustling groans alone responded to him.

"Speak—speak!" said Dick. "Has the old thing burst? If so, don't blame me—I gave you a caution."

There was no reply, and just then Dick, glancing towards the village, saw lights moving about in all directions, while simultaneously the shouting of voices and trampling of footsteps came upon his ears.

"It would be madness to stay longer," he muttered—"perfect madness; so I must leave the matter in doubt. Where shall I find the horse and cart, I wonder? I suppose I must not trouble my head about them. Well, well, it doesn't matter."

As he spoke, he made his way with great rapidity from the cage, striking right across the country in the direction of his destination.

Before going far, however, he paused, for he found himself on the verge of a large sheet of water.

He had made up his mind what to do.

As quickly as possible he tore off his disguise, which, it will be remembered, he had put on over his ordinary apparel.

He rolled it up into the smallest compass he possibly could, making it into a bundle, in the centre of which he placed a large, heavy stone.

Then, with all his might, he flung the parcel away from him, and it fell with a loud splash into the water, and was immediately lost to sight.

Dick shook himself, and then gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"Ah!" he said, "I must not despise my disguise, but yet I feel now far more comfortable and like myself. They will be puzzled to track me now, that's certain, and the sooner I get to Somefield the better."

As he spoke, he again set himself in motion, and as he walked rapidly along there was one subject upon which he did not fail to congratulate himself most heartily.

This was, that he had decided when he did to part with the gold he had received from old Matthew, otherwise, when taken prisoner by the police, this money would have been found about him, and consequently have awakened all their suspicions.

Indeed, when he looked back upon what he had gone through, he could not avoid a slight shivering feeling, which increased when his thoughts reverted to the strange manner in which he had witnessed Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack vanish from the summit of the hill.

CHAPTER CMXXI.

DICK MEETS WITH ANOTHER ADVENTURE ON HIS WAY TO SOMEFIELD

No amount of reflection, however, could make his ideas any clearer on this point.

The whole affair was a complete mystery, unless he chose to ascribe it to supernatural agency, and this Dick was loath indeed to do.

Vainly, however, as he strode hastily along, did he endeavour to come to some reasonable conjecture until, at length, he was obliged to give up in utter despair.

By this time he had once more reached the high-road.

Before he ventured to set his foot upon it he paused, and reconnoitred carefully around him.

On all sides was an intense and perfect silence, and at length, reassured by this, he ventured to spring over the low hedgerow that alone divided him from the high-way.

The night was cold, with the moon shining at times with great brilliancy in the sky, but a brisk wind from the south-west drove innumerable clouds across the face of the firmament, so that at intervals all was darkness and obscurity.

But when the moon broke forth, her light seemed all the more vivid and silvery by the contrast.

All at once Dick became aware, in spite of the profound silence, he was not alone on the high-road.

On one occasion, when the moon peeped forth, he saw before him, but only for an instant, a faint, flitting figure.

He fancied it was a female; but the glimpse he had was too momentary for him to feel certain on this point.

He walked on at a slightly reduced rate, for he wished to have no spy upon any of his movements.

A more profound darkness than usual now overspread the scene.

When at length the moon once more broke forth, Dick saw, at no great distance before him, a rude, clumsily-constructed wooden bridge.

Beneath this, water was running with considerable velocity, for he could hear it where he then stood.

The moonlight, too, enabled him to trace its course in a long, irregular line.

His attention was diverted from a contemplation of this by again catching sight of the fleeting figure.

It was now near the centre of the bridge, where it paused and looked upward.

Then Dick saw clearly, and beyond doubt, that it was a female, by her form and general appearance certainly young, and most likely beautiful.

Dick wondered what could have brought her at so late an hour to so desolate a spot, and while half hesitating whether to stay and watch her further movements, or to advance, he uttered a cry of horror.

To his great surprise the young girl, after remaining motionless a moment, sprang suddenly on to the low parapet of the bridge, and from thence dashed herself headforemost into the river below.

A faint, smothered kind of shriek and then a splash were the next sounds that reached Dick's ears.

Not for one moment did he hesitate as to the course he should adopt.

At full speed he ran along until he reached the banks of the river, close to the rude archway of the bridge.

Then, placing his hands before his eyes, he looked keenly and scrutinisingly over the surface of the water.

To his vexation, another cloud at this moment swept over the moon's disc, yet not before he fancied he saw something white floating in the water close to where he stood.

To plunge into the rushing, foaming tide was his next act.

Dick was an excellent swimmer, and struck out boldly for the object he wished to reach.

The force of the current was so great that it carried him a long way down the stream in the course of a few seconds.

But he was inspired to make every exertion to accelerate his progress, for, despite the obscurity, he perceived the form of the young girl before him.

At last, with a glad cry, he seized hold of a portion of her apparel, and, having done so, turned his face without delay towards the land.

The shore was quickly and easily reached; and, kneeling down, he supported the head of the young girl, and tried to re-awaken her to consciousness.

To all appearances, however, life was gone.

Her face was ashy pale, and as cold as death itself.

Dick had no means at hand for restoring her, and so, anxiously, he rose to his feet and looked around, trusting to find some place of shelter to which he could take her.

In doing so, his keen eye detected a faint, twinkling light.

But it was on the other side of the river, and to reach it it would be necessary to cross over the bridge.

But Dick did not hesitate to pick the young girl up in his arms.

She was a burden light to carry, for she was thin even to emaciation.

And now, as the moon broke forth again more clearly, and Dick looked down into the young girl's countenance, he saw, despite the reposeful expression upon it, that there were many traces of grief and sorrow visible.

Forgetting all his own danger in the concern he felt for this young girl, Dick hurried on.

The bridge was quickly crossed and the light neared.

It was not long before he discovered that it proceeded from a roadside inn, the inmates of which had caused a bright light to be placed in one of the windows.

The door was closed when Dick reached the building, but by one sudden blow with his foot he dashed it open and hurried at full speed along a passage and into a large kitchen, in which a bright fire was briskly burning, and where many people were assembled.

His sudden and strange appearance caused a universal start of dismay.

"Help her!" said Dick. "I believe life is not yet extinct. I have saved her from the river."

A portly, good-tempered female—doubtless the landlady—came hurrying into the kitchen, and no sooner did she catch sight of the young girl than she uttered a loud cry.

"Mercy on us, and save us!" she cried. "Why, as I live, it's Miss Danville!"

The words produced an immediate consternation upon all around, and it was evident by their manner that the name was familiar enough to every one of them.

In particular, one, a young man poorly clad, yet having a noble, ingenuous countenance, sprang forward from the rest and, with a cry of anguish, threw himself down beside the senseless girl.

"Lizzy—Lizzy," he cried—"dear Lizzy, awake—awake! I have returned!"

But his words and the no doubt well-known tones of his voice failed to produce the least effect, and he uttered another anguished cry.

The landlady, however, by this time had recovered her presence of mind, and, calling her domestics around her, the young girl was carried from the room, and means taken to restore her if possible to consciousness.

No sooner had Dick placed the young girl down in safety than the reaction came upon him.

His strength suddenly departed, and he sank down upon a seat almost fainting.

This can scarcely be wondered at considering the amount of exertion he had gone through, and the length of time that had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

One of the persons seated in the kitchen placed a glass of hot spirits to Dick's lips, who drank almost unconsciously.

The result, however, was soon apparent.

He again opened his eyes to their usual extent, and recovered from the death-like feeling that had assailed him.

The young man who had called upon Miss Danville by her Christian name bent over Dick, full of concern for his condition.

"May Heaven bless you, sir," he said, "for the act you have done to-night! I cannot thank you as I should—my voice fails me!"

"That's enough," said Dick. "If you wish to show your appreciation of it, get me something substantial in the shape of food, for I am almost dead from hunger."

This was a demand instantly and easily complied with, and soon Dick had a most tempting and appetising repast spread before him.

The young man quitted the room, anxious to learn with what success the effort had been met to reanimate the young girl.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Dick was besieged with many eager questions, and finding that the curiosity of all was greatly excited, he took the wisest and quickest means of satisfying it, which was to relate what had occurred in as few words as he possibly could.

In return, he asked whether anyone could furnish him with any further particulars.

"Yes," said the landlord, drawing a long whiff of smoke from his pipe, "I fancy you are about the only one beneath this roof who could not give all her history. Poor girl! we are all sorry for her, and wonder how her own flesh and blood could treat her as they have."

"If it would not take you long," said Dick, "could you give me a brief account of what you know, for I confess my curiosity is fully roused?"

"With pleasure," said the landlord. "You must know, then, sir, that this young girl is the only daughter of the richest man in this part of the country. He is generally called Squire Danville. He is a justice of the peace, and I know not what else beside."

"It is pretty generally whispered—and I daresay with good truth—that he never was very fond either of his wife or his daughter, and for this reason:

"His whole hopes were fixed upon a son, to whom he believed he should be able to leave his vast wealth and ancient possessions; but this daughter came into the world, and, with an unnatural feeling difficult to comprehend, he looked upon her as an object which had defeated his happiness."

"He visited his wrath, too, upon his wife, as if she could help what had occurred; but, being of a weak and patient spirit, she bore all in silence until she died."

"This girl, Miss Danville, grew up almost unrecognised and unthought of by her father, but her gentle, winning ways made her a favourite with all who knew her."

"She was loved, while her father was feared and hated."

"When very young, an attachment sprang up between her and the nephew of the housekeeper, a young, true-hearted, courageous, good-looking fellow, who, I believe, loves the very ground she treads on."

"The same that has just quitted the room, I suppose?" interrupted Dick.

"Yes, the same."

"Well, how long this attachment went on, or how long it would have continued, is very hard to say; but a certain fact recalled to the squire's brain that he had a child—a daughter."

"This fact was, that Squire Bartlett——"

At the mention of this name, Dick could not help giving a slight start, it came upon him so unexpectedly.

The landlord did not fail to notice it, for he said:

"You know this squire, then?"

"Scarcely," said Dick. "I have seen him once, that's all. But the name sounded familiar, and surprised me."

"Well, then, as I was saying, this Squire Bartlett, who is also very rich, possesses a large estate, which joins that belonging to Squire Dauville."

"He has an only son—a dissolute, mean-spirited, cowardly hound, who, thank goodness, has not been much in this part of the country; and, if all I have heard about him is the truth, he is a wretch not fit to live."

"The two squires, as you may guess, were great friends, and it was nothing more than natural, I suppose, that they should talk upon the subject of their properties adjoining each other in the way they did."

"In brief, a kind of compact or agreement was made between them that their children should marry, so that, in the future, the whole possessions would become one."

"They never thought of consulting the young folks in any way, but the blow came upon Miss Danville like a thunderbolt."

"Her father ordered her into his presence, and, tremblingly, she obeyed, feeling as though she had committed

some great crime, and was about to be led into the presence of her judge.

"She heard her father express his intentions with feelings which I cannot describe.

"He took scarcely any notice of her, but bade her prepare to receive her future husband at once.

"Great difference was now made in the manner in which she was treated.

"She was now dressed in a manner suitable to her father's rank, and allowed to sit at the dinner-table with him.

"She was quickly brought face to face with young Bartlett, and I don't wonder that she should immediately conceive an utter aversion for him.

"She loathed the very sight of him, and took so little care to disguise her feelings, that all noted the change in her aspect, particularly the young man, who ground his teeth, and turned livid with rage; while he determined, no matter at what odds, to have his revenge upon her.

"She refused most positively to become his wife, and her father broke out into a storm of passion the like of which she had never before known.

"He was furious to think that, not content with having caused him one great disappointment in life, she was now endeavouring to cause him another.

"Such conduct he considered ungrateful and base in the extreme, but he determined not to be balked this time.

"You may guess some one who was soon at hand whispered in his ears some particulars of the behaviour of his daughter and the housekeeper's nephew towards each other.

"Inquiry served to show that the whisper was correct, and he drove the young man ignominiously forth.

"Since then he has been reduced to great straits, for the housekeeper was dismissed also.

"The two squires, and young Bartlett as well, were all eager in the extreme that the marriage should take place; but Miss Danville showed a firmness and a spirit of resistance which had never been expected, and which filled them with surprise.

"But her father determined to carry things with a high hand.

"I know he had her confined like an ordinary prisoner, and scarcely allowed her enough to eat and drink.

"The poor girl pined and sorrowed, but all in vain; nothing would turn him from his purpose.

"To-morrow is the day fixed for the solemnisation of the marriage, and I can only suppose that, driven to extremities, she somehow managed to escape; and, feeling utterly wretched—perhaps in a delirium—threw herself into the water as you saw, in order to put an end to that existence which ought to be to her a blessing, and not a curse."

CHAPTER CMXXII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIS PATH STILL BESET WITH DIFFICULTIES.

"It is a sad enough story," said Dick Turpin, "and I for one am very sorry for the lovers. I cannot consider them in any way to blame."

"Neither can I," assented the landlord; "and although I am a tenant under the square, yet I hold this place under a lease which, I fancy, will not expire before his death."

"So you feel yourself independent of him?"

"Yes, quite; and if I could do anything to make these two young folks happy, I would do it gladly."

"So would I."

A murmur of assent went round the room.

Clearly they were all of one way of thinking.

Dick Turpin had been accommodated with a very comfortable seat nearest to the fire, and while he had partaken of his meal, which he washed down with some of the very best ale in the landlord's cellar, he had got quite dry.

He was now anxious to continue his journey, for midnight was rapidly approaching.

It was just as he had made up his mind to rise and take his departure that the door of the kitchen was opened again, and the housekeeper's nephew made his appearance.

There was a great degree of bashfulness, not to say

awkwardness, in his manner, and he glanced with some timidity into the faces of all present.

He evidently wished to say something, yet lacked the courage; and the opportunity to speak was quickly lost, for he was immediately questioned as to the state of Miss Danville.

"She has quite recovered," he said, in a sad tone, "but seems quite delirious. She could not have been in her right mind when she attempted to destroy herself, nor is she now."

"But she will soon be better, I trust," said the landlord.

"I hope so. But, then, that brings me to what I wished to say. I believe that all here present know my story, and are my friends?"

"We are—we are!" was the response that came from every lip.

"Well, then, my friends, since you admit yourselves to be such, give me your advice. I am young, and have had but little experience in the world. In what way shall I act for the best?"

This was a point open to a great deal of debate, and Dick Turpin was not slow to perceive it.

Nor was he any slower in making up his mind as to what he should say.

"I have saved the lady," he began, "and therefore consider that I have a good right to some voice in the matter."

"Yes, yes, certainly," murmured several.

"Well, then, my advice is simple, short, plain, and easy to follow. It is, young sir, that you go at once to Miss Danville, and persuade her to fly with you. Do not hesitate or scruple; you have a right to consult your own happiness, and so has she. Her father, by his conduct, has forfeited all right and title to the name; think nothing of him. I wish I could help you further than I can, but, unfortunately, it is impossible. However, take my advice, which is all that I can give. Place as great a distance between yourself and this inn as you can, in the shortest possible space of time."

Dick Turpin spoke warmly, and his words found an echo in the breasts of all present.

Probably they would have hesitated to give such clear and straightforward advice, yet when it was thus given by another they could not withhold their approbation of it.

A flush of colour mounted into the young man's cheeks, as he said:

"You fill me with joy, but I feel that such conduct on my part would be wrong—reprehensible in the highest degree."

"No, no—not a bit," said Turpin. "Procure Miss Danville's consent—and if I understand the case at all it will not be wanting—and then, as soon as you have it, off and away. When you are married, you will be master of the situation."

After a few more hesitating remarks, the young man withdrew, and as soon as he had gone Dick rose up from his seat.

"Are you going?" said the landlord.

"Yes, pressing business calls me, and I cannot linger. I have already stayed too long."

"And I must go too," said another voice.

A man whom Dick had scarcely noticed rose from an obscure corner near the fireplace.

He was a stout, well-built, burly-looking fellow, with closely-cropped hair, a thick, red, bull-like neck, and an altogether animal expression, if we may be allowed to use such a term.

Yet Dick looked at his well-developed form with some admiration.

The man's appearance, joined to his peculiar costume, enabled Dick to decide positively as to his calling.

He was a regular trained boxer or prize-fighter.

As soon as he had spoken, the landlord said:

"Very well, Mr. Reynolds—I will give orders for your pony to be put in at once."

"Do, and ask that lazy fellow of yours to be quick for once in his life, if such a thing is possible."

With this, Dick conceived he had nothing to do; but being, in a manner of speaking, interrupted by this stranger, he had paused.

Now, however, he began to take his leave.

But Mr. Reynolds came forward again.

"Beg your pardon, sir," he said, bluntly, and with genuine John Bull freedom, "but I like your pluck and your ways, though you are a stranger to me. I am going some miles to-night, and if you happen to be travelling any way, why, I shall be glad of your company."

Dick Turpin said a few words expressive of his thanks for this kind offer, and while he was uttering them he was debating in his own mind whether he should accept of the invitation or not.

Certainly, as time had been lost, it would be an advantage, should Mr. Reynolds be travelling towards Somefield, to share his vehicle with him.

But, somehow or other, a presentiment of danger came over Dick, and he felt impelled to decline.

The feeling, however, was one of which he felt ashamed, and so he banished it.

"I am journeying north from here," he said.

"So am I," returned the prize-fighter. "May I ask how far you are going?"

"To Somefield."

"Somefield?" he repeated. "Ah! I am not going quite so far as that, but within a couple of miles or so of it. Did you come here on foot?"

"Yes."

"Then you had a long walk before you—that's all I can say. However, if you are willing to take half my gig, and ride with me as far as I am going, you are heartily welcome to do so."

"I am much obliged," said Dick; "and accept the offer with great pleasure. I am much obliged to you for it."

"Nay, nay, don't mention it; it isn't worth a word of thanks; and perhaps you would oblige me still further by taking one more glass before we part; we shall have time, for I know what a long-winded rascal the ostler is."

This offer, after some little pressing, Dick Turpin accepted.

Two farewell glasses were brought, and disposed of, and by that time word was brought that the horse and gig were ready at the door.

Once more bidding adieu, Dick and the prize-fighter departed.

On going out of the front door of the inn, Dick perceived a small, well-built pony harnessed to a light little gig, with large wheels that seemed built expressly for speed.

"There's a turn out, sir," said the prize-fighter, with perhaps pardonable pride—"there's a turn out, sir! Fit for any prince in the world! The lightest, best-made gig, and the fastest pony to be found within a hundred miles!"

"Very likely," said Dick, as he followed his companion's example, and climbed into the vehicle—"very likely."

Scarcely had he taken his seat than the prize-fighter, snatching hold of the reins, uttered a peculiar shout.

It was clearly one which the pony perfectly understood, for it started off at a most tremendous pace, and in a few moments the inn was left far behind.

"Don't she go rarely?" said Mr. Reynolds, addressing Dick, and breaking the silence. "Did you ever ride behind such a one?"

"I can't say I ever did. You travel a good deal, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am mostly knocking about the country—first in one place, then in another. Perhaps you know me, sir, though you are a stranger to me?"

"No—I can't say that I do."

"Well, then, my name is Reynolds—you heard the landlord say so—Reynolds, the prize-fighter, I am generally called."

"I have heard of you," said Dick, "though I little thought I should make acquaintance with you so strangely."

"Curious things do come about, and this is one of them. But I am tired of this life; I have made up my mind not to fight any more."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I think I can manage tolerably well without it."

"You have been fortunate, then—made money?"

"Well, yes, fairish; but I have a little speculation under band at the present moment which I have an idea will

cause me but little trouble, and the net gain will be immense."

"I hope you will be successful," said Dick—"I hope so with all my heart."

"Do you indeed?"

"Yes. But why did you speak in that strange tone?"

"Oh, did I? Then I meant nothing—nothing at all, of course. But we are rolling along rarely, are we not?"

"Yes, we are."

"You see those twinkling lights yonder? That's where I shall stop? Somefield, as I told you, lies between two and three miles beyond."

"Then we shall soon part company?"

"Yes, I think that very likely."

"But," exclaimed Dick, "you are pulling up. What's that for?"

"This," was the prize-fighter's reply, as he let fall the reins and clutched Dick tightly by the throat—"this! I know you! Give in—it's no use to struggle, Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner, and I will have the whole of the reward!"

CHAPTER CMXXIII.

DICK TURPIN HAS A LIFE-AND-DEATH STRUGGLE WITH THE PRIZE-FIGHTER.

This attack was so sudden and unexpected that the highwayman had been thrown completely off his guard, and before he could well make out what had happened he was overpowered.

"Now I have you," said Mr. Reynolds. "And perhaps you understand the little speculation to which I referred. In two more minutes we shall be in the next town, and all will bear witness how I bring you in a prisoner, captured by my own unaided exertions!"

Pressing Dick's throat still tighter with one hand, the prize-fighter removed the other, and placed it in his pocket, doubtless with the intention of drawing forth something with which he would be able to secure his prisoner.

Dick Turpin seized that moment to make an effort of resistance.

He had been gradually summoning up all his powers, for he knew the struggle would be no trifling one.

The prize-fighter swore most fearfully, for he imagined his object had been accomplished.

But he found each moment that Dick appeared to grow stronger, and, adept as he was at wrestling and feats of strength, he felt that, for once in his life, he had encountered some one worthy of being called his match.

A struggle of the most furious character now took place in the narrow precincts of the gig.

Both had obtained a good hold, and it would have been difficult for anyone to have decided as to which would prove the victor.

No one was near, however, to note the different phases of the conflict.

But the two men fought none the less desperately on that account.

Suddenly, the prize-fighter, urged to desperation by disappointment and the peril of his position—for he felt Dick was obtaining the mastery over him—uttered again that peculiar cry which was the signal for the pony to set itself in motion.

Nor on this occasion was the signal disregarded.

With a bound that almost threw them both out of the vehicle into the road, the pony started off, terrified by the noise behind it.

Dick guessed at once the purpose of the prize-fighter, and it made him fully conscious of the desperate character of the man with whom he had to deal.

His object was to run the risk of the danger, and make his horse enter the town just before them, when doubtless he would easily obtain assistance.

It is true this would not enable him to lay claim to the whole of this reward, but he felt he would rather forego the whole of it than that Dick should escape him.

The highwayman dared not turn his attention to the horse in the least, nor put one hand to seize the reins, as such a course would have given his opponent the advantage.

Altogether heedless, then, of where the terrified beast was going, or what obstructions lay in his path, Dick

best the whole of his energies to overcoming his antagonist.

The prize-fighter felt himself getting gradually wearied, but he still held on tenaciously.

He knew the town was now within a few yards of them, and he trusted in being able to retain his prisoner until then.

Dick knew this well, and guessed why he continued to struggle so fiercely.

Cold drops of perspiration started out upon his forehead, for he could not close his eyes to the fact that he was in very imminent danger indeed of being captured.

On went the horse at a more furious speed than ever, striking sparks from the hard ground with his hoofs as he went.

Hitherto he had kept directly in the middle of the road, and, providing he continued to do this, and did not abate his speed, there was just the possibility that he would get through the town almost before anyone was aware of what was the matter.

This was a frail hope to cling to, but it was better than none at all.

Dick did not dare to think of what a trifle would bring their headlong course to a stop.

The sudden turning of a corner, the approach of any other vehicle, or, indeed, the slightest obstruction in their way, and then most surely they would go down with a crash.

The next moment the lights of the town flashed before Dick's eyes.

The prize-fighter saw them, and tried to shout for succour.

But Dick's pressure on his windpipe was so great that he could only give vent to a gurgling sound.

The street was clear.

Several people, though, were standing about here and there, gazing with amazement at the strange sight that flitted past them almost before they knew what it was.

The market-place was reached, and passed, and Dick began to think that he should be fortunate enough to ride completely into the open country once more.

The prize-fighter also had this fear, for he changed his tactics.

In his rage, he felt altogether indifferent as to the amount of danger which might befall himself, and so he struggled furiously to fall over one side of the gig into the roadway, endeavouring, of course, to drag Dick Turpin with him.

The consequence of such a fall might perhaps have been death to both of them, but for this the prize-fighter did not care—death was preferable to being vanquished.

And now, indeed, the hardest portion of the struggle had arrived, for hitherto the prize-fighter had endeavoured to consult his own safety as far as possible, and his struggle had been more to overcome the highwayman and bind him.

Now it was almost more than Dick could do to prevent him from throwing himself into the road.

Could he have done so, and remained in the vehicle himself, all would have been well, comparatively speaking, though his danger then would have been considered appalling by most persons.

Dick felt that he was being drawn slowly but surely nearer to the edge of the gig.

He felt that in another moment nothing could save them from falling over.

Rendered desperate by his position, he took a desperate course to save himself.

With great suddenness he released his hold upon his antagonist, and at the same instant clenched both his fists and struck him two hard blows.

The man's grasp perceptibly relaxed.

But Dick followed up the blows by others.

The prize-fighter tried, but in vain, to obtain another grasp of his adversary.

But Dick eluded him, then dealt one more blow of so decisive a character that it put a complete termination to the contest.

With a rush and a hideous crash the prize-fighter fell over the wheel of the gig into the roadway.

To what extent he was injured Dick had no means of guessing, for such was the prodigious rate at which the

pony was going, that his foe was in a moment out of sight.

Dick drew a long breath of thankfulness for this escape, and then had to settle down to face a danger scarcely less alarming.

The pony was now completely maddened, and Dick questioned whether any means could be adopted for checking his career.

The reins had dropped, and how to regain them was a mystery.

While going so swiftly, it seemed the height of madness to attempt to leap out of the vehicle, and allow the creature to take its own course.

Yet Dick felt this was what he would be compelled to do.

Just then his foot touched against something, and he stooped down to examine it more closely.

To his joy he found it was the rein, which had fallen over both ends of the dash-board of the gig, and so had remained secure.

Seizing hold of it, Dick began slowly but firmly to pull it tight.

But the horse seemed altogether heedless of the pressure of the bit.

Dick knew that his tremendous pace could not be checked all at once, but he hoped to do so by degrees.

His chief concern was to keep in the middle of the highway.

Tighter and tighter he pulled the reins, and yet tighter still, and he had at length the satisfaction of perceiving that the horse's speed perceptibly diminished.

He bent forward, and pulled again with his whole strength, which proved, unfortunately, too great for the strength of the reins themselves.

With a sudden snap the leather parted, and the frantic animal, again feeling his head at liberty, and chafing under the restraint he had just endured, flew onwards again, if possible at greater speed.

Dick now had clearly no resource but to run the risk of descending from the vehicle, and, after a moment's consideration, he determined to do so by lowering himself over the back.

Climbing over the seat, and clinging tightly to the scroll iron-work at the back, he lowered himself down until his feet almost touched the ground.

It required, even then, a great effort of courage to let go.

But Dick did so, and though he strove to save himself from falling, he failed to do so, and reached the ground with most unpleasant violence.

For a few seconds all the breath was knocked out of his body, but he seemed to be recovered by hearing a tremendous crash.

Raising himself up a little, he looked in advance, and then saw that one wheel of the gig had come in contact with a post, after which the vehicle seemed to vanish as though by magic, while the pony, with portions of the wreck clinging to his harness, continued his mad career.

CHAPTER CMXXIV.

DICK TURPIN TAKES REFUGE IN A TREE, BUT FINDS HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

DICK TURPIN struggled to his feet, and wiped his face, which had not escaped injury by his fall.

He had good cause indeed for congratulating himself upon having made up his mind to quit the gig when he did.

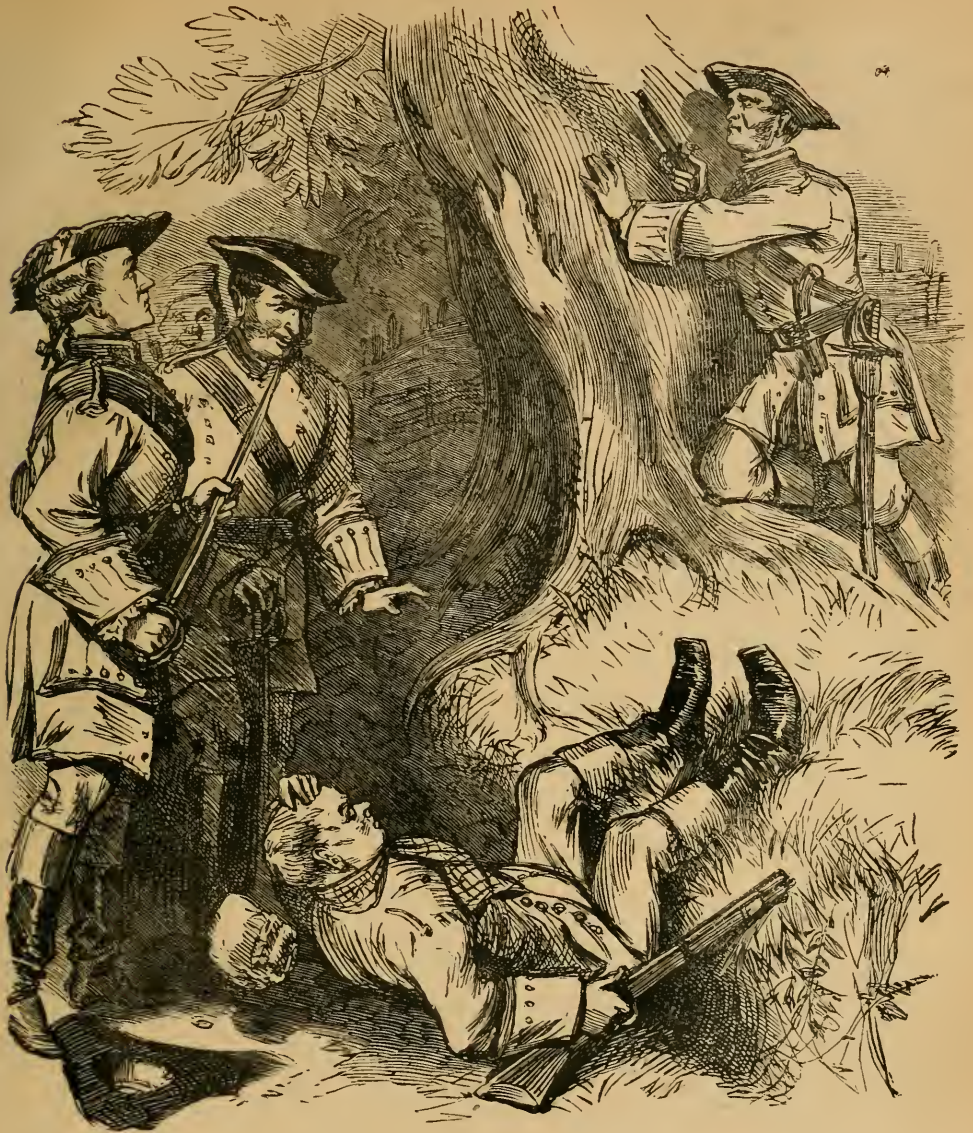
Had he remained only a few moments longer the chance would have been lost, and he could scarcely have escaped with life had he been seated in the vehicle when it came into such violent contact with the post.

Dick's brain was still confused, and he stood for some time in the road in a strange, dreamy condition.

He was startled, however, by hearing behind the sounds of horses' hoofs beating rapidly on the hard road, and at the very same moment he also perceived in the distance before him two faint, glimmering lights, which, from their distance apart, evidently proceeded from a stage-coach, or some other vehicle carrying lamps.

Dick started at once into life and energy.

"The prize-fighter has given the alarm," he muttered.



[THE OFFICERS TAKE EFFECTUAL MEASURES TO DISLODGE DICK TURPIN FROM THE TREES.]

—"that's quite certain. Perhaps, after all, he was not much injured by his frightful fall—at any rate, they are coming, and it must be after me!"

He paused and wondered what step he should take to secure his own safety.

He remembered that he was on foot, while his pursuers were tolerably well mounted.

Therefore flight seemed a thing altogether out of the question.

No matter how fleet of foot he might be, in the end he must inevitably be overtaken.

Moreover, he felt in no condition for making use of his running powers, for he began to feel now more acutely than he had at first how much he had been bruised and shaken by falling.

On both sides of the road tall trees were growing, most of them with trunks many feet in circumference, and with branches stretching far and wide in every direction.

No. 189.—BLACK BESS.

"I may be able to conceal myself in one of those trees," he thought—"at any rate, I will try. They cannot see me, I feel assured, and it would take them a long time to examine these trees, one by one in succession, supposing they had a suspicion that I had taken refuge in one of them.

While speaking these words, Dick had fixed his eyes upon one particular tree, which he determined to select as his hiding-place.

It was one that afforded several facilities for climbing.

Scrambling up the bank at the side of the road, on which the hedge was planted, he managed, by reaching up his arms to their full extent, to grasp a stout horizontal bough.

To raise himself by the aid of his hands and feet was now quite easy, and in less than a moment he had ascended half-way up the tree, and had ensconced himself

as a spot where the branches and twigs seemed to grow thickest.

Here he remained, sitting perfectly still, and waiting, not without great anxiety, to ascertain what would happen next.

The trampling of the horses' feet in one direction, and the rattling of wheels in another now grew much plainer than before, and, glancing down through the interstices of the trees, Dick again perceived the shining lights.

Directly afterwards a body of mounted men galloped past.

But upon reaching the spot where the gig had crashed against the post they came to a halt.

"Hullo!" said a voice, "he's reached the end of his race, that's certain! My eyes, what a smash!"

He pointed as he spoke to the different fragments of the gig that were strewn in all directions over the roadway.

"I wonder where the horse is?" said a voice. "Do you think he has managed to get on to the back of it and galloped off? He's a desperate character, you know, and might have done such a thing."

"Well, we shall soon know that, I think, for here comes something or other."

"What is it—the stage-coach?"

"No, no," said another voice—"not the stage-coach; it is no doubt the mail-cart."

"Yes—yes, to be sure! And if it is, the driver and the guard will be able to tell us whether a man has galloped past them."

"So they will."

A moment's silence took place.

Although this conversation took place at some distance down the road below the spot where Dick was hidden, yet he was able to hear distinctly every word of it, for the night air was very still, and what little wind there was wafted the sounds towards him.

"Hoi—hoi!" cried one of the mounted police officers. "Stop—stop, will you? Pull up!"

The driver of the mail-cart stopped his panting horses somewhat suddenly, and, in a gruff voice, demanded:

"What's the matter?"

"Why, there's a smash here—do you see? And just tell us whether you have seen a man mounted on a pony gallop past you?"

"No, no," answered the driver—"we've not seen that! But we have seen a pony, with a couple of shafts dangling at its sides, gallop down the road yonder as though it was mad."

"And there was no one on its back?"

"No, not exactly," said the driver, with a grin. "I should like to see the man that would attempt such a thing."

"Well, we're after Dick Turpin!" said the officer who had before spoken.

"What?" cried the driver of the mail-cart, in some alarm. "You don't mean to say he's on this road, do you?"

"Yes, he is, or was a short time since. Why, do you know, he got up into a gentleman's gig and, after having robbed him, bundled him out neck and crop into the road. It's a thousand wonders that he escaped with his life, and even now the gentleman lies in a very dangerous state."

"You don't mean it?"

"It's a fact."

"But when did it happen?"

"Only a few minutes ago."

The driver rolled his eyes fearfully as he asked:

"But what did Turpin do?"

"Why, drove off in the gentleman's gig, to be sure, as if the very devil was behind him. We came on in pursuit, and here, you see, it seems he met with a little mishap while going at such a furious rate."

"Yes, it certainly looks like it. But where is he?"

"That's just what I want to know. I fancied he might have got on the horse's back and galloped down the road; but, as it appears he has not done that, why, I think if we look about here we shall find him."

"Yes," said the guard, "depend upon it he could not be in the gig while it went all to smash like this without being hurt a bit. He won't get far away, take my word for that!"

"Jim's right," said the driver. "You may depend upon

it he's hiding somewhere close at hand; I shouldn't wonder if the rascal isn't listening to every word we say."

At these words the officers faced about and ran against each other, producing great confusion.

"We'll search!" said the one in command. "Now, my lads, let us look about us. I'm a teen to one, hiding in some ditch or other."

"No," said the guard, emphatically, "it's my belief that he'd scramble up into one of those trees; it could be managed easily enough. When once there, who could see him?"

The officers looked up and shook their heads wisely as they beheld the dense foliage of the trees.

"Now," said the guard, "I'll tell you what—I've an idea—a grand idea."

"What is it?"

"Why, if he's up in one o' them trees it will be very hard to find out which one it is, won't it?"

"Yes, very," said the chief officer. "We might fire a bullet into one of them; but I'll warrant he'd have the good sense to remain quite still—I'll warrant he would stand fire."

"Yes, from a pistol," said the guard, "because he would think there was a good chance of one bullet missing him. But how about this little weapon, eh?—what do you think of this?"

From the leather case beside the mail-cart he produced a large-sized carbine of the kind then made use of by the military.

"Yes," continued the guard, as he jumped down off the steps of the mail-cart, "I rather think this will be the ticket. And, mark me, if Dick Turpin is up in one of those trees I'll show him something he has never thought of in all his life."

"Is it loaded?" said the chief officer.

"Yes, of course it's loaded. The priming mayn't be just the thing; but, however, I'll soon put that right."

As he spoke, the guard threw up the pan, shook out the grains of powder in it, and placed in some fresh.

"Now," he said, "I am ready, and this gun has in it a rattling good charge, I can assure you."

"Stop a bit," said the chief officer. "Are you going to fire up in the trees with it?"

"Of course I am!"

"But how do you know which one he is in?"

"I will soon find that out," said the guard, as he put the carbine up to his shoulder. "I will begin with this one."

"Stop—stop!"

"What for?"

"Why, you know," said the officer, "that I must call him first to surrender."

"Oh, yes—certainly; I forgot."

The police officer then stepped a little more into the middle of the roadway, and, pitching his voice in a higher key, exclaimed:

"Dick Turpin, we, his Majesty's officers of police, have good reason for believing that you have concealed yourself in one of these trees, and in the King's name we call upon you to surrender, and if, after having called upon you three times—"

"Blow it!" said the guard, impatiently, "be quick! Don't you know I am in a hurry?"

"You be—d!" said the officer, angrily. "Who told you to interfere? Don't you think I know my duty better than you do?"

"Oh yes, that's right enough," said the guard, in a more mollified tone: "but you are so awfully long-winded."

The chief officer evidently thought something of the guard's carbine, or he would not have smothered his resentment so easily.

Once more looking up into the trees, he said:

"Dick Turpin, I call upon you to surrender, and warn you if you do not that we shall fire, and the consequences will then be on your own head!"

A profound silence followed this speech, that would have been perfect save for the incessant rustling of the trees.

"Dick Turpin, for the second time I call upon you to surrender!"

Again there was a deep silence.

"For the third time," said the chief officer, in a louder voice than before—"for the third time, I call upon you to surrender!"

Again a deep silence.

"Have you done?" said the guard.

"Yes."

And time too," he muttered, as he placed the butt of the carbine to his shoulder.

The chief officer pretended not to overhear this remark.

"If he's teera," said the guard, "it will be a case with him, and no mistake! I loaded the carbine myself, and know just how many bullets are in it."

"Blaze away, then!"

The guard pointed the carbine full at the tree, and then pulled the trigger.

A slight flash and a tremendous report then followed, and the next thing the officers perceived was the guard lying at full length on his back in the middle of the road, with the muzzle of the carbine pointed skywards.

The bullets went crashing among the boughs of the tree in truly an alarming fashion.

Most effectually had all doubt been set at rest respecting the presence of the highwayman in that tree at least.

Had he been there he must have fallen to the earth, riddled with bullets.

The guard scrambled up to his feet again, and looked very ferocious when he saw all the officers were laughing at his expense.

"Oh, grin away," he said—"grin away, and be d—d to you! It only shows what an uncommonly good charge I'd got in the carbine! If you'll wait half a minute, we'll have a try at the next tree."

The officers showed no signs of dissent.

The carbine accordingly was loaded, and one of the officers produced from a little bag a number of pistol bullets, quite a handful of which was poured in, and tightly rammed down.

Again the weapon was raised and discharged.

But with no more result than before.

The guard staggered back after he had pulled the trigger, and tried hard to keep his balance, but he failed, and sat down with such force that all the breath was jerked out of his body.

He looked upon all these failures and mishaps with great complacency, however, for he said to the officers:

"We may make sure he isn't in either of those trees, mayn't we? But he might be hiding in the next, or the next, and if he is in any one of them I'll find him, for I won't stop until I have fired into every tree."

While speaking, he recommenced the task of loading the carbine.

It was an operation that did not require many minutes, and for the third time he stood facing the trees. Now, up to the present moment Dick had looked upon these proceedings with a tolerable amount of composure, simply because the muzzle of the carbine was not pointed at the tree in which he had so snugly ensconced himself, and he clung to the hope that after a few trials they would get disgusted with wasting so much powder and shot.

But their proceedings were more energetic and persevering than he had at all calculated upon, and he began to feel extremely uneasy, for the tree at which the carbine was now directed stood next to the one where he was hidden.

He fixed his eyes upon the guard, and then involuntarily closed them.

When he pulled the trigger the report and crashing of the bullets among the branches was alarming in the extreme; but he quickly recovered himself, for he found he was as yet unhurt.

He had been labouring under great apprehension, however, for it was quite possible that one of the many bullets crammed into the carbine might go so far wide of its mark as to reach him.

Now, however, he held his breath, while his heart beat hard and fast.

The guard, still undaunted, was as actively engaged as ever in reloading his formidable weapon.

CHAPTER CMXXV.

THE GUARD OF THE MAIL-CART PERSEVERES IN THE PROSECUTION OF HIS PLAN.

DICK TURPIN was now truly in a most critical position.

What step to take he knew not.

He was decidedly unwilling to cry out, and so ignominiously surrender himself to the police; but for all that, he could not make his mind to sit there and remain an animated target.

In fact, he felt sure, should the guard see the "chance" into the tree, his destruction would be immediate and certain.

It was quite impossible for him to escape at least one of the bullets, and he knew well that any one of them would be sufficient to cause death.

No words can possibly describe the amount of intention with which he regarded the proceedings of his foes below.

Oh, how he hated that officious, troublesome guard of the mail-cart.

Without him the officers could never have carried out their present plan of operations.

Dick sat and watched the reloading of the carbine.

He waited until the whole operation was completed, and then, with a start, remembered that he had not yet made up his mind how he should act.

"I'll tell you what," said the chief officer, "I am tired of this sort of thing, for I don't believe he is in the trees at all; however, you shall have this one fire, and if it produces no results we'll part company."

"Oh, just as you like," said the guard—"just as you like! I don't mind it—I look upon it as a capital bit of sport."

But the officers clearly did not do so, for they were conscious that if they were now on the wrong scent they were giving the highwayman every opportunity of completing his escape.

"Are you ready?" said the officer, gruffly.

"Yes, quite ready."

"Then bang away; and make haste about it!"

For the fourth time the carbine was raised and pointed at the trees.

Dick sat perfectly still, and as he did so he fancied he could see right down the barrel of the murderous fire-arm.

Only a second elapsed, and yet to Dick it seemed a whole age.

A thousand thoughts passed through his mind.

He felt that he was on the brink of destruction.

He gave a thought to Maud, to his friends, to all he had any occasion to remember with kindness, and then closed his eyes and compressed his lips with the resolution to die calmly.

Nothing short of a miracle could save him.

But his conviction was that if his time had come it would be much better to perish by one of the bullets from the guard's carbine than descend to be taken prisoner by the police.

In either case his death would be certain.

But a loud cry at this moment made him open his eyes and start so violently that the branches of the trees clashed together.

It was the driver of the mail-cart who had given utterance to the shout.

The guard had turned round quick as lightning, wondering what had happened an alarming character.

"Look—look!" said the driver, standing upon his seat, and pointing across the meadows with one hand. "May I never hold the reins again if the rascal is not taking his way quite cosily over the fields yonder!"

"What—what?" exclaimed the officers.

"Jump up—jump up, all of you, and you will see! Look—look! Yonder he goes, just by that tall poplar tree!"

The officers scrambled up into the cart, and gazed eagerly in the direction to which the driver's finger pointed.

We have already described the nature of the night as being one when the moon broke forth at intervals.

A large rift of blue could now be seen between the clouds, and in this the moon was shining with a lustre unsurpassable.

Far and wide all objects could be distinctly seen, and the police, as they gazed over the fair, silvery-looking country, uttered ejaculations of surprise and astonishment.

At first they could not credit their vision, but a second glance assured them that they saw aright.

Dick Turpin, in his well-known scarlet coat, a large white cravat, and his three-cornered hat, was making his way at a sharp trot across the level expanse of meadow-land.

"Curse it all!" said the chief officer, as he pulled off his hat and in his rage smacked it down into the roadway. "Something told me that we were wasting our time on a wrong scent! But never mind! He is not far off my lads! Come on—we shall have him yet!"

The police left the mail-cart even more precipitately than they had climbed into it, and then ran with might and main to their horses.

"Jenkins," roared the chief, "run to that gate yonder, and open it, then we can make haste through."

One of the men hastened off to obey this command, while the others scrambled with the best speed they could into their saddles.

It was wonderful to see in what an incredibly short space of time they were all in the saddle and in motion.

The gate was held open, and they dashed through it in a dense throng, quite heedless of the injuries they received by coming in contact with each other and with the gate-posts.

Once in the meadow, they separated, and away they went at the utmost speed of which their horses were capable.

No person had been more surprised or astounded at this sudden turn of affairs than Dick Turpin himself.

He sat up in the tree with a dim, vague consciousness about him that he had escaped by a hair's breadth from a dreadful death.

He peered as well as he could through the branches of the trees, and presently made out the form of the horseman that the officers had mistaken for him.

Dick did not wonder at the error.

The figure did in many respects resemble himself.

Nor was he at any loss to recognise the rider.

It was Tom King.

After the officers had entered the meadow, Dick remained in the same position, watching vigilantly and full of anxiety to learn the result of the chase.

To his great disappointment, however, Tom King became suddenly lost to view behind a large clump of trees.

He watched to see him reappear from them.

But in vain.

Then did his concern for his old comrade redouble.

He felt pretty certain that Tom King had no idea the officers were so close behind him.

On the soft sward their horses' feet would not make noise enough to reach his ears.

"He has been well hunted about the country, that's certain," Dick muttered to himself, "and now he believes himself in safety. Tom to one he will stop among those trees for rest and shelter; and if he does his position will be an awkward one, for the officers will be absolutely upon him before he is aware that they are at hand."

Dick watched the officers until they, too, could be seen no longer.

Then he turned to a consideration of his own position.

The guard and driver of the mail-cart had also stood watching intently until there was nothing more to be seen.

Then Dick heard the latter exclaim:

"Well, come, old fellow, I think we have ridden on our journey long enough. The horses must make up for it, though—it will not do for us to arrive late."

"No, certainly not."

"Well, then, we'll be off."

"In one moment," said the guard, as, with the carbine in his hand, he jumped out of the cart—"one moment! I'll just have this one bang for the say-so of the thing, and after that I shall be ready to go with you."

These last words fairly took away Dick's breath when he heard them, they came upon him so unexpectedly.

He had congratulated himself upon being out of danger,

when now he suddenly found himself in the same imminent peril as before.

The only question that now arose in his mind was whether he should at once reveal his presence in the tree.

It would be a very different thing to deal with these two men, only he fancied indeed he should be able successfully to cope with them.

He gave one keen, rapid glance in the direction the officers had taken.

To his great joy, he found they were still out of sight.

"Jim," said the driver of the mail-cart, as soon as the guard had ceased speaking, "don't make a fool of yourself!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, not exactly what I said. But don't try to be a bigger fool than you are, for that's quite needless."

"You be blowed!"

"Very well; but I just tell you this much: I am going, and if you like to come with me, well and good; if not, stay where you are, and you can fire up those trees till doomsday, if you like!"

With these words the driver gave his horses a smart cut with the whip, and the animals, who had been chafing under their restraint all the while, now started off at a capital speed.

"Hi—hi!" roared the guard—"stop—stop!"

The driver slackened his speed.

"Are you coming?"

"Just this one shot!"

"No, am off."

But the guard was determined not to be balked in his whim, so, hastily raising his piece, he pulled the trigger.

He did not wait to see the result of the explosion, but ran off down the road as fast as his legs could carry him, bawling lustily to his comrade to pull up.

He was out of sight in a few moments, and then there was a slight rustling in the tree.

It was caused by Dick Turpin taking off his hat.

He looked at it, and through the broad brim he saw a large jagged hole, which would admit his finger easily.

"A close shave," he muttered. "But a miss is as good as a mile, I've heard say. Confound the fellow, he's been the cause of half my troubles!"

Dick felt himself carefully all over to ascertain that he had received no other hurt, and, having satisfied himself on this particular point, he paused to look around him on all sides before he ventured to make his descent.

No human being was in sight, nor did any sound break the silence, save that which the wind produced.

The moon was again hidden by clouds, and Dick felt rejoiced at it, because he knew how much it would favour his escape.

Rapidly, then, he descended from bough to bough until he once more stood on the firm earth.

Then he shook himself thoroughly, as though by that means he could rid himself of all the disagreeable circumstances through which he had just passed.

"I have had some close touches," was his muttered remark. "But no matter! There's much before me that I must attend to—besides, the hour is much later than I could wish. As all is so quiet I will set forward at once."

He carried out this intention without delay.

He knew perfectly well that he could be at no very great distance from his destination, but yet he had to consider for some moments before he was able to say positively in which direction Somefield lay.

Having at last decided upon the point, he took his course in a straight line, disregarding the obstacles that continually placed themselves in his path.

In this way he had not proceeded long, before he perceived before him a bright, ruddy gleam of light.

It increased in brilliancy with a rapidity truly marvellous, and soon the whole horizon was lighted up.

The dense clouds lost their former sombre look, and glowed with crimson.

"A fire," said Dick, after he had gazed in silence for some moments at this spectacle—"yes, surely a fire! And how fiercely and rapidly it rages!"

In a few more minutes he was so close to the scene of conflagration as to behold the huge columns of smoke as

ceding, and the thousands of brilliant sparks that rushed upwards.

As he continued to gaze, a strange feeling of uneasiness sprang up in his breast—a feeling that was indefinable, but yet which increased in power every moment.

A vague consciousness that something was wrong—that something was about to happen which would be to him a greater misfortune than anything that had yet happened to him—took full possession of his heart.

For a brief space of time it unnerved him, but, obtaining command over himself, he redoubled his speed, changing his course slightly and making his way direct to the scene of conflagration.

CHAPTER CMXXVI.

IN WHICH BLACK BESS MAKES HER APPEARANCE BEFORE THE PUBLIC IN A FRESH CHARACTER.

HAVING brought the narrative up to this point, we will take our leave of Dick Turpin for awhile, and revert to the proceedings of two others, in whom it is presumed scarcely a secondary interest is felt.

The others we allude to are Maud and Black Bess, who, the readers will recollect, had been left in the charge of the friendly proprietor of the circus.

It was shortly after Dick's departure that a man, travel-stained, dusty, and weary, came walking slowly over the common on which the strollers may be said to have encamped.

His eyes were fixed upon the bright, ruddy fire they had lighted, and which looked like a beacon of hope in the gloom.

As he drew nearer the sound of footsteps was heard, and Smithini himself, starting up, strained his eyes in the endeavour to make out the form and features of the intruder.

It was not long before he succeeded, for this new-comer advanced boldly until the ruddy light from the fire fell full upon his haggard countenance.

"Why, Jos," said Smithini, extending his hand, "can it be possible—is it you?"

"Yes, there is no doubt about it," replied the other, sadly. "I have managed to get thus far."

"But I thought you were laid up, unable to move, after that terrible fall of yours."

"Well, I was, and I am not right now, but better; I am starving, though," he added, "and so am not likely to improve. I recollected you, and from the past felt certain that you would do all you could to help me."

"So I will," said Smithini. "We'll talk about that more at length to-morrow. Here, sit down and have something to eat."

The man gladly complied, and, sitting down, he removed his hat and the wrapper from the lower portion of his face.

The firelight then disclosed the countenance of a middle-aged man, with many deep lines furrowed upon it, and the whiteness of which was brought into strong relief by the black moustache he wore upon his upper lip.

To many he was known, and as soon as their greeting was over, Smithini, turning to him, said:

"Have you any news, Joe? Is there anything fresh?"

"No," he returned, "nothing at all, except a rather odd thing that happened to me on my way here."

"What was that?"

"Why, I was suddenly encountered and surrounded by a troop of police officers. I was much frightened—I could not help it. I was rigidly examined and closely questioned, and it would seem that I had been mistaken for another."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. These officers are in pursuit of a highwayman, and a female he has with him. They have been tracked to somewhere near this place, but the clue has been lost. However, they are resolved to find it."

These words gave Smithini more uneasiness than he thought proper to express.

Maud, too, overheard the words, and it cost her a great effort to preserve anything resembling calmness.

Her anxiety to hear more, however, overcame every other consideration.

"They are on their way to this place even now," con-

tinued the man. "No doubt you will see them shortly, and they will make the same inquiries of you."

"What makes you think that?"

"Simply because I left them coming in this direction, and because I heard them say that they were resolved to question everyone they met."

Smithini lapsed into silence.

At length, however, he spoke.

"I don't like the grab," he said; "I never did; I had half made up my mind to stay here till to-morrow, but now my determination is changed—we'll start at once."

"And to what place are you bound?"

"Somefield."

"Oh, not far from here—I know the place."

"Yes, we shall reach it in a short time easily."

He rose from his seat as he spoke these last words, and issued rapid injunctions to the others to get all ready for a start.

The injunctions did not require much time to carry out—indeed, sooner than could have been expected they were all in motion.

"Fear nothing," said Smithini, whispering in Maud's ear, "I will protect you; while with me you are safe. I am doing this merely in the way of precaution."

"And Dick," she said—"will he find us?"

"Oh yes, I arranged all about that. Do not be apprehensive on that score. All I wish is to avoid a meeting with the officers."

The journey to Somefield was performed in safety and in secrecy.

Day was just beginning to dawn when they halted on a piece of waste ground just outside the little town.

A short time was allowed for repose, then the men began busily to work at erecting their large canvas tent.

It was not long before their arrival became known to the inhabitants, and there was soon a crowd of idle spectators, who stood and watched all their preparations.

It was announced that one grand performance in the circus would be given at mid-day, and by that time everything was in readiness.

To the deep disappointment of all, and Smithini in particular, for he had met with much ill-luck of late, they met with very little encouragement.

So few people, indeed, sat down upon the seats that none of the performers felt the heart to go through their performance properly.

When the audience had been dismissed, Maud found her new but kind-hearted and trusty friend seated in an attitude of deep dejection.

Anxiously she inquired into the cause.

"My usual luck," he said; "I don't know what it is to do well now. There was a time, however, when all was different, but it is no good thinking about that. You see, the people will not come, and my stock of money is now exhausted!"

Maud was not in a position to suggest any means by which Smithini could be helped out of his difficulty, yet she longed for the power to do so.

She valued his friendship, for there were few indeed who would hold out to herself and Dick a protecting hand.

"I don't know what to bring forward to attract the public," Smithini continued. "I am completely at fault!"

"And I," said Maud, "cannot help you. If I could I would with all my heart. There is nothing I would not do to assist you."

Smithini raised his eyes and fixed them keenly upon her countenance.

"Are you sure of what you say?" he asked.

"Quite sure," she answered, earnestly. "Now tell me why?"

"I was thinking—but no—no," he broke off, "I will not give utterance to that thought; it is wrong—madness!"

"Let me know it," said Maud—"let me turn my judgment of it."

Smithini resisted, but she was so pressing that he at last complied.

"Well, then," he said, "the wild idea just for a moment crossed my mind that Black Bess might be the means of saving me."

"Of saving you? How so?"

"Why," he continued, "I have been told that her master has trained her with uncommon care, and that she

is possessed of rare intelligence. It would take too long to repeat one half of the stories I have heard, but doubtless there is only a slight foundation for them."

"Not so slight as you imagine," said Maud, with a glow of joy, for she was delighted at seeing this prospect opened out before her of testifying her gratitude to her new friend—"not so slight as you imagine," she repeated. "At various times I have seen strange things done. She would obey his every word, but I fancy will attend to no one else."

"It is very likely."

"Still," she continued, with fresh animation, "if you will allow me to try I shall gladly do so. You must not forget she is so disguised that even I should not recognise her, and it might be that this would prove sufficient to attract the people."

Smithini evidently thought so.

The proposal was one that recommended itself to him in every way, but yet he hesitated.

Maud, however, insisted upon carrying out the course she had suggested.

Black Bess was brought, and she endeavoured by imitating Dick's manner to induce her to perform several tricks which she had seen.

The experiment met with a success that exceeded their most sanguine expectations.

But having succeeded so far, an obstacle now obtruded itself which threatened to be insurmountable.

To perform these tricks it would be necessary that Maud herself should appear before the audience, a thing from which under any circumstances she would have shrunk.

But now it would have been dangerous in the highest degree for her to do so.

Among the many eyes that might be upon her, there would be a strong probability of her recognition.

"I have it," said Smithini, in a voice of exultation—"I have it; our fortunes are made. 'The Masked Lady,' that sounds well, does it not? It will make a good line, too: 'The Masked Lady and her Matchless Steed, White Diamond,' will give their unrivalled performance."

"Yes," said Maud, "I could wear a mask, and then there would be almost an end to danger. At any rate, I will run the risk."

Even then Smithini hesitated.

He thought of Dick, and wondered in what light the highwayman would look upon the affair.

He was no stranger to the fact that Turpin placed a priceless value on his mare, and should any accident befall her—should she be recognised, what could he say then?

But for Maud's determination, he would at the last moment have abandoned the idea; but she was firm, and resolved that it should be carried out.

The next step was to make the inhabitants of the town aware of what was going to be performed, and this task was executed as well as the shortness of the time at their disposal would admit.

"I don't care," said Smithini. "Let only half a dozen come the first time, and I shall be satisfied. When they have seen this performance they will pour a glowing account of it into the ears of everyone."

Rather late in the afternoon a second performance was given.

It was rather better attended than the first; but it was evident they had been induced to come by the representations that had been put forth respecting the Masked Lady and White Diamond.

The moment for Maud's appearance at length came, and, dizzy and confused, she rode into the ring.

She was received with a loud burst of applause, and all looked on with the greatest excitement and eagerness at the strange spectacle of a masked performer.

Trembling for the result, Maud then uttered the words of command that Dick Turpin himself had used.

It would really seem that Black Bess understood the nature of her position, for never before had she appeared so docile—so intelligent.

Every command that Maud gave was obeyed with a promptitude that produced unbounded applause.

The experiment was a complete success.

When all was over, Black Bess was led round the ring, and all admired her matchless shape and proportions.

Never had their eyes rested on such a steed,

But little did they dream what steed it was.

Smithini, in the character of manager, announced that a repetition of the performance would be given that evening, and then the audience departed.

The words he had made use of were prophetic.

Those who had witnessed the performance of White Diamond gave so glowing an account of it that all who heard determined to attend, especially when those who had paid the visit on the first occasion declared their intention of going a second time.

To the joy of Smithini and his troop, long before the announced hour of opening, a great crowd besieged the entrance to the tent.

In they rushed, in one continuous stream, packing themselves into the closest possible compass.

The canvas erection was crammed to its fullest extent—it would not have been possible for another person to have found standing-room.

Thus the time passed on until the hour for Maud's second appearance.

Her success was even greater than on the previous occasion.

Still, there remained outside a crowd of persons sufficiently large to fill the tent again, and, by the generally-expressed wish of all, a third performance was announced, although the hour was then so late a one.

Fortune was at last smiling upon Smithini.

The money rolled in so fast that he could scarcely find places in which to stow it.

It happened thus, that the hour was long past midnight when Maud again appeared.

Again was the performance a complete success.

But before it was half over, a loud, appalling shriek was heard.

It was followed by another, and then from the throats of all issued the one word "Fire!"

There was an instantaneous rush, and then, as though to make the calamity complete, the seats, which had never been designed for the accommodation of so many people, suddenly gave way on one side.

There was a hideous crash, and the next moment the people were lying on the ground in a confused and bleeding mass.

As the seats all depended upon each other for support, those on the other side fell also before those seated on them could succeed in making an escape.

Then followed a scene of such appalling horror that no tongue could describe it, and the fearful nature of the scene was enhanced by the rapid progress of the flames.

They spread with a rapidity truly alarming.

Something might have been done to check them, it is true, but there was no one who could take that direction of affairs upon themselves at the right moment, and so the fire raged on.

By twos and threes, the bruised and burned people rolled out on to the open ground.

Selfishness reigned paramount.

No thought was given by anyone to the sufferings of another.

In the midst of the confusion a man appeared, whose arrival was unnoticed in the general excitement.

It was Dick Turpin, who had seen from afar the conflagration, and who, on coming close enough, had found that it proceeded from Smithini's circus.

He did not know at that moment that Maud was in the very centre of the building, hemmed in by maddened, furious people.

But he dashed on at a venture, looking everywhere for her.

He saw her not—he saw no one of whom he could ask a single question.

He felt certain, however, that if he raised his voice she would recognise it, and give vent to an answering cry, which would enable him to proceed to her rescue.

There was danger about this course; but at such a moment as that such danger was not to be thought of.

"Maud," he cried—"Maud—Maud! Where are you? Speak, that I may hear your voice!"

He fancied that the roaring of the flames and the shrieks and cries of the populace beat down and drowned his words.

He thought just then, too, of Black Bess, and wondered she was in the midst of the scene of riot. Just then his eyes fell upon a man, begrimed with smoke, and with his clothing badly torn. Nevertheless, he recognised him.

It was Smithini.

"Maud—Maud!" Dick exclaimed, as he seized hold of him. "Where is she—where is she?"

Smithini answered only by a groan.

Alarmed beyond expression, Dick repeated his inquiry, and so furiously that Smithini was terrified into a reply.

"She's there," he said, pointing to the remains of the circus—"she's there, in the very midst of the wreck, and Black Bess is with her!"

CHAPTER CMXXV.

DECK TURPIN IS MUCH HARASSSED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

UPON receipt of this intelligence Dick Turpin clasped both his hands over his face, and uttered a deep groan.

But he banished the emotion quickly, for he felt that it was the moment for deeds, not for grief.

How he was to make his way through the fighting, struggling throng, and gain the centre of the circus he had no idea, and it was fortunate indeed even at that dire moment that he should maintain sufficient presence of mind to be aware that any attempt to mix himself up with the throng would prove fatal.

His mind at the same instant grasped another idea.

Smithini had said that Black Bess was with Maud, and that reminded him that he had the power of calling Black Bess to his side.

There was a possibility—just a remote possibility—that Maud might come with Black Bess if he gave utterance to the signal.

The experiment was worth trying, and almost without reflection he whistled shrilly.

There was an answering neigh, and then the confusion on the spot where the circus had stood was redoubled.

With a furious rush and frantic, terrified bounds, Black Bess came galloping over those people who chanced to be in her way.

Dick could scarcely summon up his courage to look and see whether Maud was with her.

Tremblingly and in great fear he raised his eyes, and then, with a cry of joy, sprang forward.

Maud was there, seated upon Black Bess, and to all appearance quite unhurt.

In another second she was in his arms, and pressed tightly to his breast.

"Safe," she said—"I am quite safe and unhurt! And you, too, have escaped?"

"Yes—yes!" said Dick, whose heart was now lightened of a terrible load—"yes, all is well. And Bess—what about her?"

"She, too, I think, is quite unharmed, or if she is hurt it is only in a very trifling degree."

At this moment Smithini came hurrying towards them, and by the expression of his face it could be seen that some fresh calamity had befallen him.

"All is lost!" he said, when he came nearer. "My bad luck clings to me! I thought I had got the better of it for once, but no, I have not. I am now a ruined man in the fullest sense of the word!"

Dick thought he referred to the fire, but in this he was quickly undeceived.

"The receipts have been stolen," continued Smithini—"all the money taken at the doors has been carried off by the mob. I had no means of placing it in safety, and it is gone. I have not now a shilling in the world!"

"No matter," said Dick; "you remember my promise. I will be as good as my word."

"Hush—hush!" said Smithini, suddenly—"look there, Dick—look there!"

He pointed to a spot close to the scene of conflagration—a spot that was only a few yards distant.

"Officers," ejaculated Dick—"officers, as I live! I must retreat at once; perhaps I shall be lucky enough to escape unseen. Come, Maud, up quickly—quickly!"

Maud was trembling violently, and weeping, for she had not yet overcome her last excitement.

Dick, however, in this moment of fresh danger was calm and steady enough.

Keeping his eyes fixed upon the officers so as not for a moment to lose sight of their actions, he placed his hand upon the saddle and swung himself easily into his seat.

It was just then that a voice cried out in loud, shrill tones:

"Here he is—here he is; I have him now, and no mistake."

While these words were uttered, Dick felt his leg suddenly seized by some one, and the jerk given was such that it almost unhorsed him.

Luckily, he kept his seat.

The officers answered the cry with a loud shout, and came hastening towards them.

With a sudden shake Dick managed to get his foot partially free, and before the man who had seized it could save himself he received a tremendous blow in the mouth from the tip of Dick's heavy riding boot.

He relaxed his hold and fell back with a strange cry.

"On, Bess," Dick cried—"on, my lass—your best speed is wanted now!"

While he spoke the words a dropping, irregular volley came from the pistols of the officers.

But the bullets sped past him harmlessly, for the short stumpy pistols that were at that time carried by the police officers were more for show than use, and if they struck an object aimed at it was by accident merely.

But Maud uttered a loud cry, and at first Dick thought she had been injured.

She quickly assured him, however, that all was well, the cry had been wrung from her lips by terror.

There was something truly alarming in the furious rate at which Black Bess took her way across the rough, uneven piece of waste ground on which the circus had been erected.

It was of considerable extent, and some time elapsed before its further boundary was reached.

At length they reached this point in perfect safety.

But Dick had left all to the sagacity of his mare; he had made not the slightest attempt to guide her, for he knew well enough she would be better able by this means to avoid any obstacles that might be in her path.

The officers, however, were not so fortunate.

The horses of the two foremost stepped suddenly into a hole only a few inches deep, but yet such was the jar produced that they stumbled and fell, carrying their riders with them.

The others were so close behind that they could not stop themselves immediately, and thus a scene of the utmost confusion took place, a confusion which lasted for several moments.

This was an opportunity that Dick improved to the utmost.

"All is well, Maud," he cried, in a reassuring voice—"all is well! Fear nothing! If the officers are in the humour for a good gallop to-night they shall have it; but I promise them they will get nothing for their pains."

Black Bess seemed in excellent condition, and, so far as could be judged, quite overjoyed at thus again meeting with her master.

A broad, tolerably-straight and well-kept cross-road was before them, and along this Dick allowed her to proceed at full gallop.

Coming, then, to a spot where the road was intersected by another, he paused.

He had not listened more than a few seconds before he heard distinctly behind him the sharp clatter produced by the hoofs of the officers' horses striking the hard road.

"They're after us at full speed, Maud," said Dick; "but you have no cause to fear. We have the advantage of them now. When they reach this place they will have great difficulty in determining which way we have gone."

"And which way shall you take?"

Dick paused a moment before he replied, then said:

"This one to the left."

He turned Black Bess's head down it while he spoke, and again urged her to put forth her utmost powers.

speed, for he wished to get so far before the officers reached the cross roads that they would not be able by listening to detect the sound of his horse's hoofs.

Suddenly, however, while going at full gallop, he perceived something unusual in Bess's manner.

Her neck was outstretched, and her ears were projected forwards.

At the same instant, Maud said:

"Hark—hark! Dick, I can hear the officers now! How is it they have come upon us so quickly?"

Quite puzzled by this circumstance, and scarcely able to credit it, Dick brought Black Bess to a halt, and then listened.

Horsemen were approaching—there could be no doubt about that.

But he quickly found they were proceeding from a direction opposite to that which he had first expected.

"It is, ten to one, another troop," he said, in answer to Maud's query, "and it's lucky we heard them when we did, otherwise we should have dashed at full speed into their midst. They are frightfully close at hand, and I fear they must have heard us."

Maud clung to Dick in alarm.

"We are in danger," said the highwayman; "but we are not lost, for all that. Cheer up! This will be my best course now. Cling tightly."

He turned Black Bess so that she faced a low hedge-row growing on one side of the road.

She comprehended his wish, and with one bound cleared the obstruction easily.

Soft green turf was now beneath the hoofs of Black Bess, and it made a wonderful difference to her.

She flew onward as if she had suddenly received a fresh accession of strength.

The night was still cloudy, with the moon breaking forth at intervals, and now, at this moment, to Dick's vexation, a cloud parted, and the moon peeped forth.

The silvery light stole in an instant over the whole landscape.

"I fear we shall be seen," said Dick. "But the same light which enables them to see me will enable me to see them. Ah! look—there they are!"

The piece of ground on which they now were was of greater elevation than the road itself, and as Dick looked back he perceived the second troop of police officers, whose approach he had so opportunely heard, standing in a dense throng close to the spot where he had over-leaped the hedge.

Then, looking a little way to the left, he saw the other troop coming on at full speed.

In less than a moment the two forces would unite.

"They see me," he exclaimed. "But no matter! fear them not! Forward, Bess," he added—"forward, my lass! All depends upon your speed! Let us see what you can do!"

It really seemed as though the gallant creature comprehended the purport of the words that had just been uttered, for, without any further incentive for exertion, she all at once broke out into that long, stretching gallop which seemed to require no particular amount of exertion on her part, but yet which got over the ground in a style truly marvellous.

A succession of broad, undulating meadows was quickly passed over, and when Dick drew rein again it was not until he had placed many miles between himself and the spot where he had last stopped.

He was now nearly at the brow or a steep hill, and he looked back from this advantageous position, in order to ascertain whether the officers were still upon his track.

But the moon was once again covered by clouds, and it was impossible for him to see to any great distance.

He listened; but no sound resembling the clatter of horses' hoofs reached his ears.

The silence was alone broken by the whistling or low wind among the tree tops.

"Do you really think that you have distanced them?" asked Maud, beginning to recover herself from the state of fright in which she had been for so long a time.

"I trust so," answered Dick; "but at present it is impossible to say. I will let Bess go gently to the summit of this hill, and then we will pause again."

"And," pursued Maud, "supposing that you should find yourself quite clear of the officers, what will be your next step?"

Dick paused a moment before he replied.

"I can hardly answer you," he said, "except by saying that I should push on at a gentle rate and look around me for some place of shelter where we could remain concealed until the time comes for me to meet my companions."

Maud sighed.

"Where," she said—"where is this place of concealment and safety to be found?"

"We must wait and see," returned Dick, lightly and carelessly. "We have found places are now, and doubtless we shall find them again; we shall have to place ourselves entirely at the mercy of circumstances."

During this brief conversation Black Bess had been making her way at a slow walk up the steep declivity of the hill.

Now the brow was reached, and Dick brought her to a standstill.

At the same moment the darkness was dispersed, for the moon broke out once more into her full lustre.

The thick obscurity seemed to roll away like mists before the rising sun.

And so Dick looked back in the direction he had just come.

Distant and more distant objects were by degrees brought into view.

An ejaculation broke suddenly from his lips, which was echoed by one from Maud.

Dick looked again, for he could scarcely believe in the reality of what he saw.

"Confusion!" he muttered. "They have managed somehow to steal a march upon us; but how—how?" Surely by some means or other they must have possessed themselves of fresh horses."

Coming swiftly along, and at no great distance beneath him, Dick saw the full troop of police officers.

They were making good speed, he could tell that, but whether they had really obtained a change of horses was more than he could determine.

As the moon was shining full upon Dick on the top of the hill, he could doubtless be seen very plainly by the officers below, for the forms of himself, Maud, and Black Bess would be thrown into full relief by the sky behind them.

Indeed, something like a shout, sounding faint and far off, came upon Dick's ears, as though the officers had really recognised him.

It was only for a moment that Dick allowed this to give him any concern.

He saw that Maud was alarmed, and endeavoured to act in such a manner as would lead her to believe the danger was not so great as it actually was.

Accordingly, with the resumption of that reckless, daring spirit that would peep forth at times, he dropped the reins on the neck of Black Bess, and pulling off his hat, made a kind of mocking bow with it.

It was rather a gesture, to be understood by the officers as a challenge to follow him.

"Dear Maud," he said, "fear nothing. If they are in the humour for a good ride to-night, I will not disappoint them. Cling tightly to me, and then all will be well."

This injunction was scarcely necessary, for Maud held to Dick as though she felt that here only safety she could know.

At the same moment, Dick gathered up the reins, and gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

She willingly responded to it, for the brief halt they had had was sufficient to enable her to recover to some extent her spent breath.

Away, then, at a terrific pace she sped.

Their way lay all down hill, so that comparatively little exertion was required to carry her over the ground.

Away—away they went, with a speed that was absolutely terrific and alarming—a speed that no one would have thought of making in the darkness except from the conviction that by that means was their only chance of escape from death.

And it was in darkness, for the clouds, driven before the strong breeze, had again completely hidden the moon's disc.

How long that fearful gallop lasted, Maud herself knew.

To her it seemed a long and endless time.



[DICK TURPIN'S DESCENT INTO THE OLD QUARRY.]

She did not speak, neither did Dick, for the air rushed past them with such swiftness as to make breathing a matter of difficulty.

CHAPTER CMXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES A FRIGHTFUL PERIL, BUT FINDS A STRANGE PLACE OF REFUGE.

It must be understood that the course taken by Dick Turpin in his headlong flight was not along any road or beaten path, but simply across the extensive meadows with which the sides of this hill were clothed.

At times some other kind of land would intervene, but so quickly were these places passed over that they were scarcely noticed.

Great as was the distance that had been passed over since Dick saw the officers from the summit of the hill, No. 190.—BLACK BESS,

yet he did not attempt in any way to restrain his mare's progress.

On the contrary, indeed, he from time to time urged her to keep up the tremendous speed at which they had been going.

Nothing but flight could save them, and he knew full well that it was better to place as great a distance between himself and the officers as he could in the shortest space of time.

Yet that headlong progress through the darkness, with trees suddenly starting into view, and rushing past them like swiftly-flitting shadows, was something fearful to contemplate.

But, as before, Dick trusted to the sagaciousness of his mare, whose perceptive faculties, he knew from experience, were much keener than his own.

Suddenly, while in the midst of this furious gallop, Black Bess came to a stop with so much abruptness that

it is a thousand wonders her riders were not flung violently from the saddle.

Dick was taken completely at unawares, and he partially lost his seat, and a less accomplished horseman than himself could never have regained it.

Dick was puzzled beyond measure by this sudden stoppage.

What could have been the cause?

He strained his eyes, but the obscurity appeared to thicken.

He could distinguish nothing beyond his mare's head.

Black Bess had her neck stretched out and her ears projected forward, while she trembled from head to foot as though enduring the utmost fright.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Maud, fearfully—"what is it?"

"It must be something in the way," Dick answered—"some obstruction or other, though I can see nothing."

He patted Black Bess on the neck while he spoke, then strove to reassure her.

"Gently, old lass," he said—"all is well! Forward—forward—slowly! There—that's it!"

With very great difficulty, the highwayman succeeded in persuading his mare to take a few hesitating steps in advance.

She did not take more than a dozen before she again stopped, and this time she planted both her fore feet together firmly on the ground, as though expressive of a determination not to allow anything to urge her beyond that point.

"Oh for a gleam of light!" said Dick. "If the moon would only shine now as it did a short time ago, we should be able to comprehend the meaning of this mysterious circumstance."

"But there seems no hope of it," said Maud, as she glanced upwards and saw that the whole sky was covered by one huge, dense cloud.

"It will not do to pause here," were Dick's next words; "it is impossible to say where the officers may be, and on this soft turf-land the hoof-strokes of their horses would be inaudible."

"What is to be done?"

"Don't be alarmed, Maud—there is as yet no cause for fear. I will descend and grope carefully forward, when doubtless I shall discover what this obstruction is."

But this course seemed to Maud to be fraught with a thousand terrors, and so she clung so tightly to Dick that he was unable to alight.

"Turn her aside a little," she said—"then perhaps she will go on as before."

Dick thought it worth the trial, and pulled the rein.

To no purpose, however.

Black Bess would move neither to the right nor the left; in fact, she seemed to be growing more restive every moment.

"There is no danger," said Dick, "and if I attempt to force her she might turn round and gallop in the way we have just come, and that would be death."

Maud felt this, and reluctantly removed her arms.

Without another word, Dick slipped from the saddle to the ground.

Retaining his hold upon the reins, he stooped down, and, with one hand outstretched before him, groped forward.

He was startled by a slight exclamation from Maud, and paused.

Just then, a faint, misty light began to creep over all things.

He knew then what had produced Maud's exclamation.

Glancing up, he found that the moon had reached one portion of the dense cloud less opaque than the rest, and through this partially-transparent medium she shone with a dim and sickly lustre, yet her light increased as the clouds drifted onward.

Dick looked down again, and then he staggered back, uttering a loud cry of alarm, which almost had the effect of causing Black Bess to break from his hold.

The shout was echoed by a shriek from Maud, for both had looked down on the ground at the same moment.

What words can express the horror they felt upon making the discovery that they had paused upon the very verge of a huge excavation, so wide and so deep

that the misty, uncertain light was insufficient to reveal the other side or its lowest depths.

Black Bess, when she placed her feet so determinedly upon the earth, was little more than a foot from the brink of the abyss.

Dick himself, when groping forward, had been so close to it, and so near falling down, that the bare recollection of it made his brain spin round and round.

It was only for a moment that they were allowed the opportunity of taking a glance at the excavation.

The moonlight again faded away, and all was obscurity as before.

Maud trembled so excessively with fright that she could scarcely retain her seat.

By an effort, Dick recovered himself from his consternation.

"A fortunate escape," he said—"a most fortunate escape. Black Bess," he added, patting his mare upon the neck while he spoke, "once again I owe you my life, for without you I should surely have perished."

"I am terrified to death!" said Maud. "Back—back! Come further back—I cannot remain so close to the verge!"

"You are safe," said Dick—"quite safe. The danger is over, now that we know it. We have had a frightfully narrow escape from an awful death, and it will be long indeed before I can forget it."

In spite of his efforts to speak calmly, it was easy to see that Dick was much overcome.

Probably he would have given way still more to the feelings that would naturally be called forth by such an event, but for the recollection that he still stood in great danger.

The officers were still behind him—how close he could not say.

It was rather difficult now for Dick to determine what course to take.

The transient view he had obtained of his surroundings sufficed to show him that the excavation was of vast extent and very irregular in shape; thus to attempt to skirt it in the darkness would be attended by no little difficulty.

Yet he felt that this was what must be done.

He could not advance, and to retreat would be only to diminish the distance he had been at such pains to place between himself and the police officers.

"I will not mount at present," he said at length. "Remain where you are, Maud, and I will lead Bess by the bridle, then you may be sure that all will be well. I will not put my foot down until I know that there is firm earth to place it on."

Maud remained silent, and Dick took her silence for consent; but it was more because she felt her emotions so great as to obstruct her utterance.

Stepping lightly and carefully, as he had promised, Dick advanced, taking care to keep as far away from the brink of the abyss as he was able.

From time to time he looked up anxiously towards the sky above.

The wind was increasing in force and steadiness each moment, and drove the clouds along at a tremendous rate, so that he indulged in the hope that ere long the moon might break forth again and light him on his way.

As well as the rushing of the wind would let him, he listened, but he could hear nothing of his foes.

Yet they might be close behind him, though, when he took into consideration the length of time Black Bess had been going at full gallop, he scarcely thought it possible.

There was a consolation to be found even in the darkness.

If it concealed his pursuers from him, it also concealed him from them, and it also multiplied the chances of missing him.

In so an obscurity as that it would be hard indeed to keep upon his track.

Once more the sky began gradually to grow lighter, and far away on the horizon could be seen a long bright streak, which appeared rapidly to widen as the clouds came driving on.

He soon found that this was a rift of considerable extent, and when the moon entered it again, every object around him was brought into full view, as though by the magic stroke of some enchanter's wand.

On this occasion he was able to see the general configuration, but not the depth, of the place into which he had so narrowly escaped falling.

Hitherto he could only guess at the character of the excavation.

Now he saw that it was a huge stone quarry.

From various signs that he saw around he concluded that it had remained for many years disused.

The strata of soft earth that lay above the stone had given birth to vegetation of all kinds, in most places growing in luxuriance, so as to give the quarry an aspect of rare picturesque beauty.

The sides were rugged, irregular, and steep.

The quantity of stone removed must have been immense, for although he drew close to the verge and strained his eyes to the utmost, Dick was unable to perceive the bottom.

At various places on the sides, however, trees were growing out in oblique, fantastic fashions, while the splashing and rushing of water came distinctly to his ears.

The thought that entered Dick's mind while gazing at this place was a very natural one, considering his position.

Turning round first, so as to avail himself of the light of the moon while it lasted, he looked keenly in the way he had just come.

But to his great satisfaction no signs of the police officers could be perceived.

"See here, Maud," he exclaimed, when he had satisfied himself upon this point; "have we not been fortunate in reaching this strange place?"

"Fortunate?" she repeated, in accents of surprise.

"Yes, surely so; we have outrun the officers, of that I am certain. You were asking me where I should find a place of refuge. Behold, it is there. Chance has thrown it in our way."

But Maud shrank back in some dismay at the prospect of taking shelter in so wild and desolate a place.

"Yes," continued Dick; "it is only in such small place as this that we can hope to remain in safety; we shall be dependent upon no one save ourselves, and therefore shall have nothing to fear in the shape of treachery in the depths of this huge excavation. No one would think of looking for us; or if the place was visited, we should, ten to one, escape observation. Believe me, we cannot hope to find a better place than this."

"But how shall we descend?" said Maud, becoming more reconciled to the idea of remaining in so gloomy a place, by the considerations of its safety. "The sides seem to me like walls."

"In all probability," returned Dick, "there is a path somewhere leading down into its lowest depths. That path we must find, and carefully pursue."

"I see no signs of it."

"Nor I at present. You can guide Black Bess, and while you are doing so I will creep close to the edge of the abyss and make good use of the moonlight while it lasts."

Dick did not wait for Maud to make any reply, but going as close to the edge of the quarry as was consistent with safety, he walked rapidly along, looking keenly all the time, in the hope of discovering the path of which he had spoken.

For a long time he saw nothing bearing any resemblance to it.

In one place he saw what looked like steps roughly hewn in the stone, but these were impracticable.

It was necessary to find some sloping path, down which he could lead Black Bess.

After much searching, he was at length rewarded.

A narrow path was found, but it was so much overhung by the stone that it required a very quick eye indeed to detect it.

The descent was very rapid, and must at all times have been attended with a great amount of danger, but now that danger was much increased by the presence of a quantity of green moss, which seemed to rest upon the surface of the stone, and which changed to a watery moisture beneath the feet.

In all probability, however, there was no other mode of descent into the quarry save this, and accordingly Dick hastened to Maud's side.

"You will have to summon up all your courage," he

said, "for the task before you is a difficult one; but you must endeavour to gather confidence by thinking what safety we shall gain by adopting this course. Once fairly at the bottom of that quarry, we can bid defiance to all the officers in the kingdom. I am convinced they would never dream of looking for us there."

Certainly nothing would have inspired Maud with more courage than the thought that she was about in some way to contribute to Dick's safety.

She had always been in a state of perpetual alarm on his account, and thought how grateful would be the change could she but feel certain that for a time he was in no danger.

Nevertheless, although she steelled her heart well, her courage for a moment failed her when she saw the narrow, precipitous path down which she would have to make her way.

But, recovering herself with great difficulty, she said:

"Lead the way, Dick—lead the way, and I will follow. It is necessary that you should take Black Bess by the bridle, and when I see you both before me I shall have confidence to follow in your footsteps."

"As you will," said Dick. "It will, I expect, be no easy task to lead Black Bess; but yet, with care, it may be accomplished."

Accordingly, he took hold of Black Bess by the bridle, and led her towards the brink of the precipice.

She shrank back in natural terror, yet did not hesitate to follow where her master led.

Taking each step slowly and carefully, Dick began to descend.

Black Bess slipped more than once, and every time a pang of alarm shot through his breast.

He knew how easy it would be for her to fall over the side of the narrow pathway into the depths below.

Maud, too, occasioned him much anxiety, and at every moment he would look back, in order to make sure that she was safe.

But Maud, wisely making the resolution not to turn her eyes in the direction of the quarry itself, steadily stepped onwards, for the most part keeping her hands close against the side of the precipice, acquiring additional confidence by this intangible handhold.

After going down some distance, they found themselves upon a small flat piece of rock, or what the French would call a plateau, and here Dick paused a little while, in order to take a glance at that portion of the pathway which led down from this place.

He endeavoured also to make out how much further he would have to descend, and as the moon just then was shining brightly, he perceived, or fancied he perceived, among the many shadows down below, the tops of a few stunted trees, and the sparkle of running water.

The pathway presented much the same appearance as before, and it was entered upon with additional confidence.

It conducted to a second plateau, from which they similarly descended to a third, and from the third to the rough and rugged bottom of the quarry.

Huge stones were lying about here and there promiscuously, and in some places grass and trees were growing.

Save and except the rushing of the water, a profound silence prevailed in this place.

A cold chill was in the air, and the darkness was such as to have a most depressing influence upon the spirits, for although the moon shone down into the quarry, yet she was not near enough to the zenith to illumine this its lowest depth.

Oppressed and half terrified, Maud crept closer to Dick's side, who, however, was impressed very differently by his surroundings.

"Safe now, Maud," he said, and his voice sounded unearthly and strange as it reverberated among the recesses in the stonework—"quite safe now. The officers will not find us here."

"But," said Maud, with a shiver and a sigh, "should they by any chance learn of your whereabouts, would you not then be completely at their mercy?—would they not hold you as if in a trap?"

CHAPTER CMXXX.

RETURNS TO TOM KING, AND SHOWS HOW HE ADOPTED A CLEVER STRATAGEM TO GET RID OF THE POLICE OFFICERS, AND WHAT WAS ITS RESULT.

WHEN Tom King parted from Dick Turpin in the little plantation at the back of the Three Spiders Inn, he made his way with as much speed as he could towards the open country, which he trusted to reach unperceived.

But this expectation was doomed to disappointment.

Despite all the elaborate precautions that he took, an officer stationed near the spot whence he emerged uttered a loud shout, and immediately followed it up by discharging his pistol.

These two acts served at once to raise an alarm, which was just what the officer intended, and in a few minutes he found himself surrounded by four or five of his companions.

He answered the questions they poured in upon him by pointing across the fields, where, at some distance, the flying forms of Tom King and his steed could be distinguished.

"Make all speed!" he said, addressing the others. "A sharp touch is most likely to do it; but a stern chase, I have heard say, is a long one, and, if you are all of my mind, we will keep on his track, and never quit it until we have slain or captured him. If this goes on much longer we shall get so much disgrace that we shall be dismissed in a whole body."

"We are with you!" said the others, and while they uttered the words, they lashed and spurred their horses savagely.

The animals were tolerably fresh, and as the officers by this time had learned from experience that they could have no chance of success whatever unless mounted upon cattle of superior quality, they had not on this occasion neglected to provide themselves with the best steeds they could procure.

With scarcely any delay, then, the chase was commenced, and Tom King had the mortification of knowing that the officers were close behind him—so close that he could scarcely be said to have had a start worth speaking of.

But Tom knew to what extent he could rely upon his horse; it had served him well on many previous occasions, and, moreover, it had lately had good rest and food, and therefore would be capable of putting forth its best exertions.

Away, then, at full speed he went, until the turnpike-road was gained, and along this he resolved to make his way, chiefly because on the opposite side of it he saw nothing but ploughed fields, over which he knew it would be madness to attempt to ride.

With a prodigious clatter, then, he sped along the highway in the direction of the country.

People and vehicles were passed so quickly that only a transient glimpse was obtained of the flying horseman.

Perceiving presently before him the white, gleaming bars of a toll-gate, and knowing full well that at that hour of the night the gate would be closed, Tom again took to the fields.

His horse leaped over a low hedge easily, and then he found himself once more with turf beneath his feet.

Another ploughed field forced Tom King upon the high-road again.

In passing the toll-gate he had made a considerable detour, and this had told greatly against him, for the officers, having kept direct along the road without relaxing their speed, were now clustered together in a dense throng around the toll-gate, which a man was in the act of unlocking.

But Tom still had the start, and as the road had a gradual downward tendency, his horse was able to keep up the headlong gallop without much distress.

Further and further into the country Tom went.

He was incited to urge his horse on to the uttermost, for slowly but surely he saw that the space between himself and the officers was gradually getting wider and wider.

But his horse now began to cause him much apprehension.

More than once it had staggered and limped as though wearfully exhausted, but yet as if so full of mettle that it

would gallop on until it fell down dead rather than relax its speed.

Such being the case, and as the officers were now quite out of sight, and almost out of hearing, Tom began to look about him for some means of throwing his pursuers off his track.

Glancing to his right, he saw nothing before him but a smooth expanse of country, which offered him not the remotest chance of concealment.

On the left the highway was bounded by a very high stone wall, so high that, though on horseback, he could not see fairly over it.

This wall was of immense length.

It stretched as far as he could see behind and before him.

By the trees which he perceived growing in great luxuriance over this wall, and indeed by the general appearance of the place, he readily enough concluded that this was the boundary wall of some large estate, such as can be met with in many parts of England.

This, then, offered him no chance at all.

It was quite in vain to look for shelter in this direction.

Nothing remained for him to do but to goad the already bleeding flanks of his horse, and so force him to keep up his gallop.

Fainter and fainter, however, grew the sounds of the horses in his rear, until at length they became so indistinct that it was only at intervals they floated to his ears.

Suddenly, while flying onward at this rate, he perceived that this long stone wall, that seemed as though it had no termination, was broken in upon by a gateway.

The sight of it caused a sudden thought to dart into his mind, a thought which was instantly matured.

He felt that he should be able to put into execution a stratagem that promised well to baffle the acuteness of his foes.

Accordingly he brought his horse gradually to a standstill, then turned his head round and took him gently towards the gateway he had passed.

Reaching it, he saw that it was an ordinary five-barred gate, and that it opened upon a broad, well-kept road that appeared to lead in a direct line across the park.

Hurriedly descending, he examined the fastenings of this gate, and saw that they consisted only of a kind of spring latch which allowed him to make ingress easily.

Passing quickly through the gate, he closed it after him, then, placing his ear upon the ground, listened.

Faintly—very faintly, but yet so audibly as not to be mistaken, he could hear the dull thud, thud produced by the beating of the hoofs of the six horses on the road.

"They may have heard me stop," Tom muttered, "but I doubt it. If they have, they will be in some doubt as to which way I have taken. It's a good thought—a lucky thought; I will imitate the hare by doubling directly on my course."

He sprang into the saddle in a moment, and with an amount of audacity truly wonderful, and yet which promised well for the success of his scheme, he turned his horse's head in the direction from which the officers were coming, and so rode on as it were to meet them, only the high stone wall of which we have spoken lay between.

On this side of the wall, too, the ground was soft, and as Tom allowed his horse to go at a moderate speed, his footfalls scarcely made a sound.

It was only occasionally that there was a slight crackling of twigs to betray his progress.

As he thus went on, the sounds of the officers approaching grew more distinct with marvellous rapidity, and at length Tom deemed it prudent to pause.

The stone wall was quite sufficient to screen him from their view, and it would be a pity if any accidental sound he might make in forcing his way onwards should attract their notice, and so lead them to suspect his whereabouts.

Getting as close as he possibly could to the wall, he remained quite still, busying himself, however, by stroking and caressing his horse's neck, by which means he trusted to keep the creature quiet.

There was little fear, however, that it would either move or make any sound.

It was so fatigued as to be only too rejoiced at an opportunity of recovering its lost breath.

The officers were now close at hand, and Tom could not hear them approaching so closely without a sensation of uneasiness creeping over him, though he had the greatest confidence in the stratagem he had adopted.

He was pleased to find that there were no signs of the officers abating their speed in the least degree.

He could hear them urge their horses onward both by voice and by the smacking of their riding-whips.

With a sudden rush the whole troop swept past him, and no sooner had they done so than he was irresistibly impelled to raise his head above the wall a little, and peep at them.

They did not remain long in view, being hidden from his sight by the thick, interposing branches of hundreds of trees.

Nevertheless, he could hear them, and this sufficed to let him know they were still galloping along the highway.

"Now," said Tom, to himself, "forward once more—forward! And every step I take will indeed increase the distance between the officers and myself! If I am careful, in a little while I shall be rid of them, for no one has seen me enter this place, and there will be nothing to serve them as a clue to the way I have taken."

Imagining, however, that little advantage was to be gained by keeping close under the shadow of the wall, Tom gradually increased his distance from it, being induced to do so by the fact that the vegetation was more scanty further from it, and consequently he was thus enabled to make better speed.

And now he came to a portion of the park—for park it was—consisting only of turf, and being entirely destitute of trees.

Over this he went at full gallop, then stopped, for before him was a dense preserve.

He hesitated a moment as to whether he should endeavour to force his way among the thickly-growing trees.

But he resolved not to turn aside; he was going now in the right direction, and the chances were that this plantation would not be of any great extent.

Just as he was about to enter it, he perceived a board nailed up to one of the largest trees.

Some words were painted on it in white letters, but this was all he could make out—there was not light enough to read by.

"A caution against trespassing, I suppose," muttered Tom, with a light laugh. "Well, I need not trouble about that. If anyone attempts to interrupt my progress, they will find they have an ugly customer to deal with!"

With this reflection he pushed his way through the trees, hoping in a little time that they would become less dense.

For the most part, they were saplings, with thin, supple boughs, which were easily displaced.

Every now and then the faint cry of some night bird would reach his ears, and then there would be a whirring and fluttering of wings as some large bird or other would be disturbed from his perch.

Tom's mind was now comparatively easy, for he fully indulged in the belief that he had got rid of the police officers entirely.

All around him was so very still and quiet, and so unsuggestive of the presence of his fellow-creatures, that it is no wonder such a feeling should occupy his breast.

That confidence, nevertheless, was suddenly shaken.

His horse stopped abruptly, and uttered a loud cry, unmistakably of pain.

It struggled and kicked furiously; but one foot was fast.

It plunged again, and then Tom was conscious that one of the horse's hoofs had struck against some other obstacle.

The action was instantaneously followed by a flash and a loud report.

At the same time the horse plunged again, snuffed, and then fell down all at once as if struck by lightning.

Tom with difficulty disengaged his feet from the stirrups in time enough to prevent himself from receiving any injury by this fall, but he did so.

These last events had occurred so suddenly and so unexpectedly that for a few minutes he was stunned and completely bewildered; not being able to comprehend

what had happened, he was surprised that the report of the gun should not have been followed up by any attack upon him.

He stooped down to look more closely about him.

Examination served to banish his bewilderment. It was plain enough to see what had happened.

The owner of the preserve, in order to prevent others from poaching on his domain, had placed man-traps and spring-guns in various places.

In one of the former Tom's horse had placed his fore foot.

It was this which had brought him so suddenly to a stop, and which elicited the cry of fright and pain.

The horse was now lying quite still, either dead or dying, and so artfully had the deadly weapon been contrived that its contents had proved mortal.

Tom congratulated himself upon his own narrow escape from sudden death, the recollection of which served to make the calamity of the loss of his horse sink into comparative unimportance.

Any attempt to recover his horse he saw was fruitless, and how to repair his loss he knew not.

Yet a moment's thought told him that probably in the grounds some other horse would be found which he might be able to capture.

The trappings would be necessary, and these he hastened to divest his horse of.

The saddle had been removed. He was in the act of pulling off the bridle, when there came suddenly upon him the flash of many lights, the sound of voices, the trampling of footsteps, and the crackling of the underwood.

"Stand still!" roared a loud voice—"stand still! If you move one step we will all fire, and your death will be certain! Surrender—you are our prisoner!"

Confused by this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs, and dazzled by the lights which proceeded from the lanterns carried by the men, Tom stood still, as he had been commanded.

He gazed anxiously around, and saw that he was surrounded by several men—one-half bearing lanterns, the light of which was turned full upon him; the other half with guns pressed against their shoulders, and with the muzzles pointed at his breast.

CHAPTER CMXXX.

IN WHICH THE GAMEKEEPERS MAKE TOM KING A FAST PRISONER.

In that brief, rapid, but comprehensive glance, Tom King saw something more, which served, to some extent, to allay the alarm that was rising in his breast. The men by whom he was confronted and called upon to surrender were not attired either in the costume of police officers or of dragoons.

They were, indeed, as their dress plainly showed, neither more nor less than gamekeepers, who, hearing the explosion of the spring-gun, had hastened to that part of the preserve.

"I surrender," said Tom King. "I have no intention of attempting to make my escape. You see I have met with an accident."

The word was repeated by the gamekeepers in tones of surprise and derision.

But three of them stepping nimbly forward, placed themselves one on each side and the other behind him.

"What are you about to do?" he asked. "Why do you make me your prisoner?"

"For poaching."

Tom laughed loudly.

"Poaching?" he said. "The idea of such a joke! I should like to know who ever heard of a man going poaching on horseback."

"Well, if not poaching, it's trespassing," said one of the gamekeepers, in a gruff voice, "and that's all the same to us—Sir Thomas does not allow either the one or the other; so come along!"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Tom—"there's no necessity whatever to trouble Sir Thomas in the matter—I am sure it can be settled easily between us. Look here—you can see what kind of an accident I have met with. In my ignorance of where I was, having lost my way, I blundered into this preserve. My horse put his foot into the trap, touched the wire connected with the spring-gun, and so has met with his death."

"That may be all right enough," said the gamekeeper who had last spoken, "but it is trespass, and we have strict orders to take all trespassers into custody."

"Yes, I know all about that," said Tom, "but there are exceptions to every case, and I suppose a little consideration from me will put matters quite straight."

There was a silence, and Tom said:

"Let me see. Why, there are six of you. Now I suppose a couple of guineas each, or something like that, would be very acceptable to all of you, and no one would be the wiser."

"Well," said the gamekeeper, "of course, if you are prepared to treat us liberally, that's another thing, and your business might be urgent enough to make it worth while to pay something to be let off."

"Decidedly," said Tom—"decidedly."

He plunged his hand first into one pocket and then into another, but, to his consternation, discovered he had not about him anything more than some loose silver.

The gamekeepers began once more to look distrustfully and suspiciously upon him.

Tom was greatly mortified, for he saw that if he had only happened to possess a few guineas he would easily have got out of his present situation.

Not that it was particularly an alarming one, but, then if he did not extricate himself from it at once, there was no knowing what complications it might lead to.

"My good friends," he said, "I have not about me the amount I promised, but I give you my word of honour you shall have it at any time that you think proper to appoint—say to-morrow night. I will meet one of you, or all of you, anywhere you choose, and will give you the amount."

"Oh, gammon!" said the one who, by the common consent of his fellows, took the lead in the affair—"gammon! I thought how much you were going to give us in money. You will take notice," he added, addressing the others, "that we are all witnesses to his having offered to bribe us with money to get off."

"Yes—yes."

"Now, take care!" said Tom. "I give you my word, and you may depend that I shall not go back from it; but if you refuse, why, then you will find that I shall turn out a rough customer to deal with."

"Oh, all right," said the gamekeepers—"we will take the risk of all that. Now, then, just march along, will you, or it will be the worse for you!"

While these words were spoken, those three gamekeepers who had already taken hold of Tom King tightened their grasp upon him, while the three others immediately placed themselves in the rear, and pressed the muzzles of their guns against his back.

In this position he was commanded to proceed, and threatened, in case of his refusal, that the guns should be discharged, the men alleging that Sir Thomas would take care to hold them blameless.

There was an amount of rough, savage earnestness about the manner in which these men spoke that could not by any possibility be mistaken.

Tom King instinctively felt that they would not hesitate to carry their threat into execution.

He most bitterly regretted now that he had allowed himself to be taken captive at all, since by so doing he had shut himself out from all chance of regaining his liberty.

Disagreeable and repugnant as it was to him, he had no other resource than to comply with the demands of these men, and to march inominously forward.

They pushed him on, indeed, at a much greater speed, and with much more violence, than was at all necessary.

Tom King disdained to say another word to those fellows, but he kept himself particularly on the alert, so as to be able to take advantage of any trifling circumstance that might arise that was capable of being turned to his benefit.

The men knew every inch of the ground, and consequently took the shortest way out of the preserve.

Tom then found himself in a large meadow, beyond which over the tree tops he could dimly distinguish the chimneys of a habitation.

This he expected was the residence of the Sir Thomas who had been mentioned by the gamekeepers.

In the same manner as before Tom was hurried across

this meadow, and so by a rather circuitous route to the back part of a large, old-fashioned building—one of those comfortable residences of dull red brick which the great landed proprietors were so fond of building two or three centuries ago.

As the hour was late, this mansion—for such it might be termed—was plunged in darkness, save and except that from one solitary window came forth a beam of light.

Manifestly their destination was this building, and Tom began to wonder whether it would not be better to run the risk of receiving a wound from the gun rather than suffer himself to be carried beneath any roof.

But before he had time to make up his mind on this point a door was opened, through which he was quickly hustled.

Then he found himself in a small chamber on the ground floor, wherein a huge fire was burning.

This chamber, he imagined, was chiefly for the use of the gamekeepers while engaged on night duty.

An old man, with a stern-looking face, to whom the gamekeepers showed some degree of deference, was the only inmate of this apartment, and he rose slowly to his feet when the throng entered.

"A prisoner, Ambrose," said one of the gamekeepers. "We caught him trespassing in the north plantation. Just open the door, will you, and we will make him right till morning."

The man addressed as Ambrose took a huge key from his pocket, which he fitted into a small, strong-looking door, which Tom did not notice until he thus went towards it.

The gamekeepers pushed him on, so that he was compelled to follow in the footsteps of this man.

Passing through this door, however, he found himself at the foot of a winding flight of stairs, and then he was made to ascend them, very much against his will.

The ascent was long and trying, and Tom felt certain that he must be at the very top of the building.

Suddenly Ambrose stopped, and pushed open another door that grated harshly upon its hinges.

Across the threshold of the room into which it led Tom was thrust, and then, as quick as lightning, the door was closed, locked, and bolted.

The man descended the stairs again, after which all was still.

As Tom had comprehended, the room in which he now stood was at the very top of the mansion.

It was always used for the reception of those prisoners who might be made by the gamekeepers during the night, and it was rarely indeed that it was without an occupant, for Sir Thomas was one of those strict preservers of game who looked upon the unlawful slaughtering of a bird or hare as a crime almost worthy of being punished by death.

As often happens, however, the very severity of the punishment did not deter the people from continually poaching upon his domains, and it was supposed that he lost more game in this manner than any other resident in the county.

The chamber was very dark, but Tom King managed after awhile to see dimly about him.

Articles of furniture there were none—not even a bench on which to sit.

There was only one window, and that was scarcely deserving of the name, being merely a square opening in the wall, placed so high up as to be considered out of reach of everyone.

Upon that window Tom's eyes at once fixed themselves.

From what the reader knows already of his character, it may be guessed that he did not for one moment intend to submit quietly to any fate Sir Thomas or his myrmidons might design for him.

His immediate object was to escape, and that object he determined to effect somehow or other.

Walking close up to the wall beneath the window, he reached up with his hands as high as he could, and found that the tips of his fingers were a few inches from the sill of the window.

A slight spring from the ground, however, enabled him to hook his fingers over it, and the grasp thus obtained was sufficient to enable him to draw himself up until his breast was level with his hands.

Then he saw, somewhat to his surprise, that the win-

dow was defended only by one perpendicular iron bar, which looked to be far enough away from the wall on either side to allow his body to pass through.

Clinging tightly with his left hand, Tom reached out with his right, and took hold of this iron bar just mentioned.

By the aid of this he was able to draw himself up as high as he could.

As he expected, there was just room to allow his head and shoulders to pass between the wall on one side and the bar on the other.

He looked down, and for a moment felt rather giddy.

He saw, at a great height from the ground beneath him, at all manner of angles and at varying depths, the roof of the building, and from his position he made out that he was in a kind of circular turret that rose up from the centre.

For what purpose this tower was designed he knew not, but just then he was startled by hearing a clock strike the hour.

The sounds were sonorous to a degree, and Tom then found that above him was a large turret clock.

He looked down, and wondered how he should escape.

He was no longer surprised that the window should have been left comparatively so unguarded.

Few, indeed, would be able to climb up to it at all—those who did would naturally hesitate and shrink before they attempted to lower themselves from such a height.

Indeed had not Tom King had a price upon his head, and knew that so many were thirsty for his blood, he would have banished all further contemplation of making his escape.

The remembrance of these facts, however, nerved him to such deeds as would make others not similarly situated shrink back appalled.

The distance to the roof immediately beneath the window was considerable, and, moreover, this roof slanted at a very sharp angle, so that in dropping upon it it would not be possible to retain any hold.

Seeing, however, that rolling down the tiles he should only fall into a gutter formed by another portion of the roof sloping from an opposite direction, Tom King resolved to run the risk.

It was a matter of some difficulty to turn round in such a confined space as he was now in, but this feat was accomplished, and he began slowly to lower himself through the window feet foremost.

He continued to do so until he held only by his hands, with his body remaining stretched at the full length of his arms.

He did not dare to look below, to hesitate, or to think upon the consequences of his fall.

He shut his eyes and released his grasp.

He came with a sharp shock upon the tiles, several of which were loosened by the violence of his fall.

Half sliding, half rolling, he continued to descend until brought up by the gutter of which we have made mention.

Here he remained for some minutes, only partially in possession of his consciousness.

But what sense that remained to him was fully occupied in listening, in order to ascertain whether any alarm had been given by the noise he had made.

So far as he could tell, however, all was well, and at length he scrambled to his feet.

He found that he was badly bruised, but as yet did not suffer much pain—that would come in time, no doubt.

Judging by what he had already accomplished, Tom King had little more to do, and yet it was no easy task to look forward to having to reach the ground from the top of that lofty habitation.

But Tom scrambled over the roof tops until he reached the outer parapet.

Along the inside of this he crept until he had almost made a circuit of the building.

Then he came to a spot where there was another roof below him, apparently belonging to some outbuilding.

Straining his eyes, he could make out beneath him something that looked like a large yard, with stables on one side of it, and coach-houses on the other.

"Ah!" he said, "this is the place to descend. Confound Sir Thomas and his gamekeepers! they have given me some trouble, but they shall pay for it! I've lost one

horse, but I'll take good care not to quit these premises until I have supplied his place with the very best animal to be found in his stables. And here goes, for the sooner I am off the better."

Tom then, with great daring and apparent recklessness, climbed over the parapet, and by the aid of an iron pipe fixed against the wall, slid rapidly down until his feet rested on the roof beneath.

CHAPTER CXXXI

TOM KING ESCAPES FROM HIS TEMPORARY PRISON, AND PROVIDES HIMSELF WITH ANOTHER HORSE.

THE further progress of Tom King was, comparatively speaking, easy enough.

From this roof he descended to another not far beneath it.

From that to another outbuilding, and then to the ground.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the ground than, with a suppressed, savage growl, a dog sprang at him.

It was one of those sly, treacherous animals which give no warning of their presence until within reach of their victim.

Tom King, however, partly in surprise, and partly in dread of receiving a bite from this savage creature, gave such a bound that he escaped his fangs.

At the same moment his hands came in contact with a pitchfork that was resting against the wall.

To seize hold of this, and use it as a weapon of defence, was the work of a second.

The dog came rushing on, and then received such a blow as sent him back howling.

With desperate courage he renewed the attack, and Tom King, being more self-possessed than before, raised his weapon, and waited patiently.

When the moment came, he dealt the animal a blow that stretched it senseless, if not lifeless, upon the ground.

But all this had not been done without creating a great deal of noise.

Indeed, there seemed every probability that the alarm would in a moment be raised.

Had he been so minded, however, it would have been perfectly easy for Tom King to have made his escape from the yard at that moment, but he determined to carry out the intention he had originally expressed, and accordingly darted at full speed towards the door leading to the stables.

The door was not locked, but merely latched, that being considered quite sufficient protection, for the grooms and stable-helpers all slept close at hand.

Fully impressed with the necessity of making the utmost speed, Tom King seized hold of one of the horses—the first one he came to—and led it out.

On the end of the stall had been hung a saddle and bridle, and these Tom flung on rather than properly placed them.

One bound placed him in the saddle; then, bending his head low down upon the horse's neck, he urged him forward, and darted through the door into the yard.

This was a proceeding that took greatly by surprise, and much disconcerted, a man who, having been aroused by the barking of the dog, and yet not knowing what had caused it, had descended to ascertain what was the matter.

Seeing the stable door open, he had hastened towards it, and he had just reached the threshold when Tom darted forth in the manner we have described.

The man was thrown down at once, and with a prodigious clatter the highwayman reached the yard.

By this time, however, the alarm had been given generally.

The gate leading into this yard had been left open by the gamekeepers, and Tom saw a man hurrying to close it.

But spurring his horse savagely, he caused the animal to start off at full gallop.

The gate was passed before anyone had time to close it, and the next moment Tom King was making his way at a tremendous rate across a large piece of smooth, level turf.

He felt now that he had nothing to fear, yet was never

stealthy desirous of getting off Sir Thomas's estate as quickly as he could.

Taking things altogether, he had much to congratulate himself upon, though now, as he began to grow somewhat cooler, the effect of the different bruises he had received made themselves painfully apparent.

At length, to his disappointment, he found himself again opposite that high wall that had been erected upon the boundaries of Sir Thomas's property—a wall of such a height that it was quite out of the question to think of getting a horse over it.

The only thing that remained in Tom's power was to follow its course until he met with a gateway similar to the one through which he had previously passed.

This, however, might cause him some little additional difficulty, for probably there would be time to allow of men being posted at the various exits from the estate.

Time was clearly of importance, and so he again spurred his horse.

He was pleased to find that the animal of which he had so recently possessed himself was of tolerable quality.

His stamp was good, though it would seem by his manner that he had lately performed a long journey, and had not yet recovered from the fatigue occasioned by it.

After going about a quarter of a mile further to the left, Tom found another gate, and just as he reached it he happened to look back towards the mansion.

Then he saw in the darkness lights flashing about, from which it was evident close search and pursuit were being made after him.

However, he was now quite clear and free from danger. He opened the gate and rode through on to the broad, well-beaten highway.

At first he fancied he had emerged upon the very same road he had so lately quitted, but upon looking more carefully around he soon became convinced that this was an error.

The road he was now upon ran almost parallel to the other, but it was at a considerable distance from it.

Turning the horse's head in the direction of the country, he allowed the animal to proceed at an easy rate, as there was now no immediate hurry, and he wished to reserve its strength as much as possible.

After going for some distance without accident, he reached a point where the road divided, forming what is called a fork.

The triangular piece of ground formed by the junction of the roads consisted of a field well defended by high, thick hedges.

Tom King as he approached gradually slackened his speed, for he was somewhat in doubt as to which of these two roads he should take.

While in this state of uncertainty, a man suddenly started up from behind the hedge just at the sharp angle of the road.

Tom uttered an exclamation as soon as he saw him.

The man raised his hand, though for what purpose Tom did not guess.

The next moment there was a flash and a report, and, with a whistling sound, something sped past the highwayman, which he knew at once to be a bullet.

The occurrence was so strange a one that he could scarcely make it out.

This man had evidently been lying in wait for him to make his appearance, and yet how should he know that he was about to reach that point?

Again, it seemed as though the man had purposely missed him—it was either that or else he was a terribly bad marksman, for Tom was only a few yards distant.

The most probable thing was, that this man had been placed there to watch for the appearance of some one else, for whom Tom King had been mistaken.

The highwayman's first impulse was to start in pursuit of this man, who appeared to be at an immediate retreat upon discovering his mistake.

But a second thought induced Tom to alter his mind.

"It seems to me," he said, "that I know the means of rendering some one or other a valuable service. That rascal beyond doubt has been posted here by some one to assassinate some gentleman who is expected to be riding this way about this time. I will save him—or, at any rate, I will put him on his guard."

Accordingly, although he was running no small per-

sonal risk by so doing, Tom King turned his horse again, and rode slowly in the direction he had just been coming.

But he did not go much more than a quarter of a mile.

He pulled up then, for he by no means relished getting too near to Sir Thomas's estate.

Scarcely had he come to a halt than the clear, unmistakable sound of a horse's hoofs upon the road reached his ears.

"The intended victim comes," he muttered. "But, whoever he may be, he shall be saved from the fate that awaits him! That rascal shall be disappointed!"

Upon a second thought, Tom King thought it would be better to ride forward slowly to meet this approaching horseman than to remain in waiting, and he accordingly restrained his horse, allowing it to go simply at a walk.

In a few moments he perceived before him in the distance the dusky figure of a man on horseback.

To protect himself from the cold night air he had wrapped around him a thick travelling cloak.

As soon as ever he was near enough, Tom King raised his voice, and said:

"Hold, sir! let me entreat you to stay—let me warn you that your life is in danger."

The horseman checked his speed irresolutely, and seemed half inclined to gallop past our friend.

It was by no means strange that he should have his doubts as to the advisability of allowing a stranger to come close to him at a time when the roads were so unsafe for all travellers as they were then.

Tom guessed what was passing in his mind, and endeavoured to reassure him.

"You need be under no apprehension," he said; "you will receive no harm from me—in fact, I have turned altogether out of my way in order that I might be able to give you this necessary warning. Bethink yourself, sir; have you an enemy?"

The stranger hesitated for some moments before he replied.

Then, in a constrained voice, he said:

"I think not."

"I differ with you," said Tom. "Chance entirely has brought me upon this road to-night, and while riding a little distance further on a man suddenly started up from behind the hedge at the junction of the high-road, and fired a pistol at me. The shot could not have been intended for myself, but he was evidently placed there to assassinate some one who was expected to be passing by about this time."

The stranger received this intelligence with considerable coolness—in fact, his misgivings as to the character of the man who had accosted him had increased.

Perceiving that he paused, Tom continued:

"If it was known to anyone that it was your intention to be upon this road at about this time to-night, let me entreat you to turn aside and travel by some other way; if not I fear your life may be the forfeit."

The stranger walked his horse slowly forwards, and as he did so he addressed Tom King in a sneering, sarcastic tone of voice.

"My good sir," he said, "I am obliged to you—infinite obliged to you! But no doubt I shall stand as good a chance of escaping from the bullet as you did yourself."

"Stay!" said Tom, perceiving that he continued to ride on—"stay—stay! for I am convinced the man saw that I was not the person he was on the look-out for, though he did not discover his mistake in time to check himself in discharging the pistol."

"I again repeat that I am obliged to you," answered the stranger, as sneeringly as before. "My way lies in this direction, and I shall take it. You will excuse me, but I never like to form acquaintances on the road, so oblige me by keeping your distance."

As he spoke he spurred his horse, and the animal started onward at a kind of cantering gallop.

"Well," said Tom, to himself "this is a specimen of ingratitude surely, and yet, after all, the man is not to be blamed. At any rate, I will try to save him even now."

Accordingly, Tom rode after the stranger, who had nevertheless in this short space of time obtained a tolerably good start.



[TOM KING TAKES A DESPERATE LEAP FOR LIFE.]

Tom rode on swiftly, keeping his horse not upon the highway, but upon the strip of turf that lay upon one side of it, so that his approach was almost noiseless.

Still he was afraid he should not be in time to render the stranger the assistance he expected he would need, for already he could see before him the spot where the roads converged.

There was just a question whether the man, after having made this failure, would remain at his post and make a second attempt.

Tom's mind was occupied upon this point, when suddenly he saw a bright flash of light.

He uttered an ejaculation that was drowned by the report of the firearm, and then, with a loud cry, the stranger fell headlong from his horse.

"I will catch the assassin, at all risks!" was Tom's next determination, and he urged his horse to his utmost speed in order to carry it out.

No. 191.—BLACK BESS.

He could not fail to give some indications of his approach, and these must have been overheard by the assassin, for he beat an immediate retreat.

Tom was not to be baffled, however, but kept up his pursuit.

On reaching the triangular meadow, however, and looking around him, not a trace of a human being could be seen.

For a long time he searched rigidly in every direction, but in vain—no trace of the assassin could be found.

He had evidently secreted himself in some well-concocted hiding-place.

The failure in his purpose filled Tom King with no small degree of chagrin.

But finding his efforts here were useless, he turned them to another quarter, where he hoped his aid would be welcome.

Accordingly, he hastened to place himself by the side of

the stranger, who now lay immovable in the centre of the high-road.

Fortunately, his feet had become disengaged from the stirrups as he fell.

The horse had vanished. But had the stranger's feet remained entangled, he must have been dragged, a bruised and bleeding mass, at the heels of the terrified animal.

Alighting, and stooping over him, Tom raised him gently from the ground.

"Speak, sir," he said—"speak if you can, and tell me what I can do in your behalf."

After a deep sigh, or rather groan, the prostrate traveller spoke.

"Ah! it's you, is it? You have come now to exult, I suppose, and to reproach me for having despised your warning. Go—go! I desire nothing but to be left to myself."

"I am sorry to find you in this mood," said Tom King. "I am prompted by motives of humanity only, and I assure you if there is anything I can do, any service I can render, you have but to speak, and it shall cheerfully be performed."

CHAPTER CXXXII.

TOM KING REACHES, AS HE BELIEVES, VERY COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.

THE stranger groaned again, and pressed his hand tightly upon his left breast, on the spot where the bullet had struck him.

"If you live near this place," continued Tom, "tell me so, and direct me to it. I will lead you thither; or, if you are too much hurt to allow of that, I will hasten off and summon assistance."

That deep-seated feeling of mistrust or suspicion which was so prominent in the stranger now somewhat broke down, and when he spoke again it was in a tone of voice totally different to that which he had previously employed.

"Forgive me," he said, "for my rough, suspicious manner! If you knew all, you would not wonder at my behaviour. I do not live far from here. My house is almost within sight, but whether I shall ever reach it again alive, I know not."

"Let us hope so!" said Tom. "Do you think, if I bound up your hurt to the best of my ability, and raised you to your feet, that you could manage to seat yourself upon my horse? If so, I would lead him gently to your house."

"You are very kind and considerate," said the stranger, in accents of amazement. "I cannot understand why you should take all this trouble with one who is a perfect stranger to you."

Tom King thought fit to disregard this speech—at any rate, he did not make any reply to it, but busied himself in rudely bandaging up the ugly-looking wound the stranger had received.

Then, as suggested, he raised him to his feet, and after that, with much difficulty, the stranger was assisted into the saddle.

By his directions, Tom led the animal forward.

On the way but few words were exchanged.

Tom endeavoured to keep up a conversation, but the stranger remained silent, and therefore Tom desisted.

The truth was, the stranger was much more severely hurt than either himself or the highwayman imagined, and it was as much as ever he could do to retain his seat in the saddle.

His brain swam, and at every step he felt as though he must fall sideways to the ground.

A deadly feeling of faintness also came stealing over him, but the house was now within sight.

It stood quite alone, surrounded by its own spacious grounds, and was situated almost at the summit of a gently-rising piece of ground.

On reaching the lodge gates, which were closed, Tom seized the bell handle, and gave it a hearty pull.

But scarce ly had he done so than, with a sudden rush, the stranger fell heavily to the ground.

Tom darted forward as he saw him falling, but was not in time to save him.

Some little delay took place before the lodgekeeper appeared, and when the door was opened, Tom cried:

"A light—a light! Be quick—fetch a light!"

An old man came forth, carrying in his hands a candle, which he had quickly placed inside a battered lantern.

He uttered an exclamation of grief and surprise at what he saw.

"Quick!" said Tom. "Give me the light! Let me look at him!"

"My poor master!" said the lodgekeeper. "Oh, help—help! Who will ride off for the doctor?"

"I sadly fear no human aid would be availing," replied Tom King, who by this time had inspected the stranger's countenance. "There can be no mistaking its expression," he added. "Your master, if such he be, is dead."

"Dead?" said the old man. "Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

"Help me to carry him inside the lodge," said Tom, "and as soon as you have done that, send some one for a doctor—I will remain here."

Tom's suggestion was promptly carried out.

The lifeless body of the stranger was placed gently on a rude kind of bench, near the fire, on the ground floor of the lodge.

The old man then took his departure, hastening off at a speed that one would scarcely have expected from a man of his years.

Tom King looked again into the stranger's countenance.

There could be no doubt that life had fled for ever.

The interior of the lodge was most oppressive to Tom, and he sallied forth to keep watch outside.

He had secured his horse to the gate, and now he went up to it, and patted it gently.

While so engaged, he fancied he heard a well-known sound.

He listened again, and was convinced that his ears had not deceived him.

Persons on horseback were approaching the spot, and, from the direction they were coming, most probably would be the party of police officers he had been at so much pains to elude.

He hesitated a moment as to what course he should adopt.

If he went inside the lodge the officers might ride past without suspecting his presence.

But then, on the other hand, their aid might be called for by some of the servants, in which case Tom would be recognised, and in all probability the death of the unfortunate gentleman laid to his charge.

This consideration, and also the reflection that he could not possibly do any good by remaining, made Tom resolve to seek safety in flight.

Accordingly, untying his horse, he sprang into the saddle, and, again taking to the open country, galloped off across the fields at the best speed of which his horse was capable.

From time to time he glanced back, but he saw nothing of the police officers.

This was not so very surprising, considering trees were growing in clusters here and there, which prevented a clear or uninterrupted view being taken.

Arriving at the summit of a hill, Tom King drew rein to look about him.

Already in the east, he could perceive unmistakable indications of the approach of the coming day.

"It is time I found some place of shelter," he thought; "and yet where shall I find it? As yet to-night I have not had the opportunity of remaining more than a few moments in any place without being molested. Where, then, can I hope to conceal myself for a long period?"

While these thoughts were passing through Tom's mind, his eyes rested successively upon the various objects of which the landscape was composed.

But although he saw many things, he shook his head at every one of them, for none promised him any chance of the shelter he sought.

"I must ride on," he said, "and trust to the chapter of events. I cannot do wrong by getting away from London, so this is clearly the course I ought to take."

Turning his back to the faint grey flush of light in the east, Tom King took his course steadily forward into the open country.

He looked about him incessantly with great wariness.

but no saw nothing whatever of a character to excite his apprehensions.

A feeling of great fatigue, however, began to creep over him, a feeling which at first he tried hard to banish, but failed. It would assert itself in spite of all his efforts.

This made him all the more desirous of finding some place whereat to rest.

He was also forcibly reminded that a long time had elapsed since he had partaken of any food.

The district he was in, however, seemed very thinly populated, for not so much as a rudely-built, thatched cottage met his gaze.

Still he rode on, until the darkness of night rolled away and daylight fairly came.

The sun rose and climbing high up in the sky found him still pursuing his lonely course, growing at each step more and more exhausted.

The sight of a thin wreath of blue smoke curling up from among some trees a little distance in advance roused him into fresh life and animation.

Quickening his horse's steps, he shortly found himself in front of one of those old-fashioned places, half farmhouse and half inn, which a hundred years ago were commonly found all over the country.

As was usually the case, there was an air of peaceful serenity dwelling around this place, and Tom immediately became susceptible to its influence.

"If I only dared to run the risk of staying here," he muttered, "how comfortable I could make myself for a short time, but I fear it is not to be thought of. No, no; it would be unsafe in the highest degree. I had better not be seen even."

Tom was about to ride on, when just at that moment the front door of the inn was thrown open and an elderly man with round, stooping shoulders made his appearance.

"Good morning, sir," he said, in a civil, offhanded tone of voice. "Do you wish to stay here? I have the best of entertainment for man and beast."

Tom hesitated.

"Think twice before you decide to go on," said the landlord; "for, judging from your appearance, you have made a very long journey, and must be fatigued. Don't ride on with the expectation of finding some other place, for you will have to go twelve miles at the least before you meet with a chance of halting again; and then the accommodation you get there is not for a moment to be compared to what you will have here."

"You are not troubled with many visitors, I suppose?" said Tom, thoughtfully.

"No, not many, I am sorry to say. The sight of a traveller is quite a treat. If I depended only upon what the inn produced I should have been in the workhouse long ago."

Tom was pleased to find that the house was of so lonely a character, and he imagined as well that at the present moment there was no other traveller resting beneath its roof, or the landlord would have mentioned the fact.

Then Tom began to consider that it was unlikely indeed that his foes would find him out at this place.

"I will stay," he said, suddenly, unable to resist the temptation—"I will stay, landlord, and I shall look to you to make me comfortable."

With quite a radiant smile upon his face, the landlord came forward, and was profuse in his expressions of welcome.

"You keep no groom or ostler, I suppose?" was Tom's next remark.

"No, I should have nothing for him to do. I will attend to your horse, sir, if you please; don't be afraid to entrust him to my care."

"Not by any means," said Tom; "but as he is a particular favourite of mine I will walk with you to the stable, if you have no objection."

"None whatever," said the landlord—"none whatever; you are welcome to go wherever you please about the place."

"That's the way, then, I suppose?" said Tom, nodding his horse by the bridle and pointing to a wooden shed.

"Yes, that's the stable, and when you are inside it you will find that it is more comfortable than it appears."

Tom advanced, and in a few moments he had the satisfac-

tion of seeing that his horse was properly attended to.

This being done, he returned with the landlord to the inn.

"There's no one up at present," he said to Tom, "excepting myself, but the missis and my daughter will be down directly. What would you like for breakfast?"

"Anything that you have in the house that you can get readily," was Tom's response. "Can you let me have a private room?"

The landlord smiled.

"They're all private enough for that matter," he said; "for while you are staying here I very much question whether I shall be so fortunate as to see another strange face. Two travellers stopping here in one day would indeed be an extraordinary occurrence."

Tom laughed as he said:

"But I should like a private room for all that; I should then be able to guard against any intrusion."

"Your wishes shall be attended to, sir. Step this way."

Then throwing open a door, the landlord added:

"This is our best parlour, sir, and you are heartily welcome to make use of it while you stay."

"And what about the breakfast?"

"Would ham and eggs suit you?"

"Excellently," said Tom; "and make haste!"

He seated himself in what the landlord called the best parlour.

It was indeed a very decent apartment, and Tom was by no means inclined to quarrel with it in any particular.

A feeling of great drowsiness came over him while he sat waiting for his breakfast, and to overcome it he was obliged to get up and walk round and round the room.

He paused several times to look through the window, which commanded a view of an extensive piece of country.

But all as far as he could see was perfectly quiet.

"I believe I shall be safe here," he muttered to himself for about the hundredth time. "I think I might venture to go to sleep."

The meal was brought in and done ample justice to, and when the landlord came to remove the cloth he said: "I don't know how long you may be wishing to stay, sir, but don't hurry off on any account, only—"

He paused.

"What?" asked Tom.

"Only I have some particular business to do in the next town, and I shall be obliged to go to-day. It only happens once in a year, and I have to make the journey, and it is especially aggravating that it should come now."

"Not at all," said Tom—"not at all! I am inclined to rest more on my horse's account than my own, and perhaps I may remain here the greater part of the day; most likely you will find me here upon your return."

Upon hearing this, the countenance of the landlord brightened.

"You will be well attended to," he said. "I will give particular instructions about that."

"Thanks," returned Tom; "but I don't think I shall give much trouble."

"Very good, sir, just as you like, but if you want anything just touch the bell, and it will be answered at once."

"I shall take a nap if I can," replied Tom, "for I have a long ride before me as yet. However, you leave me to make myself comfortable."

The landlord withdrew, and Tom, still fighting against the irresistible inclination he felt to fall asleep, walked about until he had seen the landlord take his departure.

After that the silence of the inn grew more and more oppressive, and Tom, unable any longer to keep his eyes open, laid himself down at full length upon the comfortable sofa placed against the wall on one side of the parlour, and had no sooner assumed a recumbent position than he fell fast asleep—so fast that he was altogether dead to all external noises—so fast that not even the approach of a body of horsemen in the front of the inn would arouse him, as was proved by the fact of such an arrival taking place several hours after he had first closed his eyes in slumber.

CHAPTER CMXXIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING MEETS WITH A VERY GREAT SURPRISE.

It seemed to Tom that he had only closed his eyes for the space of a moment when he opened them again.

To his surprise and confusion, however, he saw around him nothing but darkness.

He sat up on the sofa and rubbed his eyes doubtful whether he was really awake.

A second glance around him assured him that there was no mistake upon this point.

His eyes rested upon the window, through which he could obtain a glimpse of the night sky.

"Can it really be," he muttered, "that I have slept away the whole of this day. I can hardly believe it, and yet—"

He stopped suddenly, for he heard voices somewhere very close to him; indeed, at first, he could not make out from whence the sounds proceeded.

But he soon discovered that one side of the best parlour was composed only of a wooden partition, which divided it from another apartment, and it was in this last-named place that several persons were seated engaged in conversation.

Something had just been said, and caused a general laugh.

"We'll have more to drink," said a rough voice. "It's not worth while to go yet, our horses are so much exhausted; besides, I don't like leaving such a snug place as this."

"No—no!" came from several lips, and then another voice cried:

"Ring the bell."

The command was immediately followed by a sharp tinkling sound.

There could be no doubt whatever that during Tom King's long and deep sleep some visitors had actually arrived at the roadside public-house, and what was more, that they had arrived in tolerably strong numbers.

An immediate curiosity respecting them sprang up in Tom's breast.

He considered it was highly imperative that he should make himself acquainted with everything that was going on around him.

The next sound which reached his ears was the opening of a door, then a feminine voice asked what was wanted.

Rum punch was unanimously ordered, and the girl withdrew to prepare the steaming beverage.

By this time Tom's eyes had grown tolerably familiar to the semi-obscurity which filled the best parlour of the inn.

He was now able to see with a certain amount of distinctness even in the darkest and remotest corners.

His principal attention, however, was directed to the wooden partition.

He was wondering whether he could find any small chink or opening through which he could take a peep at the inmates of the next room.

Something that looked like a shutter or movable panel at the top of the partition at length rewarded his search, but it was far up out of his reach.

Before lying down, Tom had taken the precaution to lock the door; and now, on tiptoe, he crossed the room, picked up a table, and carried it with him, and placed it against that part of the partition.

By standing on this, however, Tom was scarce tall enough, for the panel was placed just where the partition joined the ceiling.

By placing a chair on the table, however, all difficulties were overcome.

Tom took care to mount as quietly as possible.

He found he had made no mistake—there really was a small door about a foot square in one of the upper panels.

Why it should have been placed in such a position he could not conceive, nor did he much trouble himself about the circumstance—he was content to find that it was there, and so convenient.

Care would have to be taken in opening it, so that while doing so the attention of those in the next room should not be attracted.

But this was accomplished by opening the door a

very little way, and then pausing until, by degrees, it was opened sufficiently for him to look through.

Before this was the case, however, the girl had returned with the bowl of punch.

As she placed it on the table, one of the guests said:

"I think you told us, my dear, that you had no one staying in the house at the present time?"

"I don't remember that I said anything of the sort!" was the reply, given in a pert tone of voice.

"Oh yes, you did; or if you did not it don't matter. There is no one, I suppose?"

"Well, no one that I've seen," replied the girl; "but rather said a gentleman arrived early this morning, and took the best parlour, but I have not seen or heard anything of him."

"Oh!" said the voice. "And pray where may your father be?"

"Why, he went over to Mapleton this morning, and has not come back, though I expect him every minute."

"Oh, very well!" was the reply. "Then, when he comes in, just tell him we want to speak to him."

"Very well, sir!"

"And also, should that gentleman you have not seen make any movement just let us know, will you? I have a curiosity to peep at him."

It was just at this moment that Tom King, who also had a curiosity to take a peep, looked through the panel he had so carefully opened.

What, then, was his amazement, not to say alarm, to perceive that quite a large party of police officers were seated most comfortably in the adjoining room, and separated from him by nothing more than a thin wooden partition.

He looked into their countenances one by one, but without recognising any.

In doing this he also counted them, and found the number to be fourteen.

How on earth they could have arrived there, and sat down to make merry, without his being aware of it, Tom could not imagine.

It seemed to him incredible that he could have slept so soundly.

By keeping his face at a little distance from the opening there was not much fear that any of the officers would see him, so Tom did not quit his exalted position, but remained with the determination of watching the course of events.

There was just a bare possibility that the officers might depart without seeing him at all; for, from the manner in which they were enjoying themselves it was evident they had no suspicion of his presence there.

"Are you sure," said another officer, who sat close to the fire—"are you sure, my dear, that you can't give us some sort of description of the gentleman who came so early this morning?"

"Why, now, how can I do any such thing? Didn't I say I hadn't seen him?"

"Yes, yes—to be sure you did!" was the answer. "But, then, your father might have mentioned what sort of a looking gentleman he was, or something of that sort."

"No, no—I hardly saw father this morning, he was off so soon, and he said nothing whatever on the subject."

"But you expect him back very soon, you say?"

"Yes, every minute. Hark! Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"The sound of wheels! It is father—I'll warrant it is father! People rarely pass here after dark."

The girl was proved to be correct, for the revolution of the wheels suddenly ceased.

"Then, my dear," said the officer seated at the fire, "if that's your father, just go quietly to him, and say that we are here, and want to ask him an important question."

The girl withdrew, and immediately afterwards returned. She had met her father in the passage.

Never did man look so astounded as he did upon finding the room so full of company.

Upon his entrance there was a momentary silence, so accordingly he made a kind of circular sidelong bow, in which he included every person present.

"Glad to see you, gentlemen," he said—"very glad indeed to see you! It's a coldish night outside, and the fire must be acceptable."

"Yes, yes, landlord," said the officer who had before spoken—"but come here; I want to speak to you quietly about something."

With wonder in his looks, the landlord complied.

"Your daughter tells me," said the officer, with great emphasis, and bringing the forefinger of his right hand into the palm of his left hand at every word he spoke, "that early this morning a traveller arrived here and took a private room."

"Yes, that's quite true, but he has gone by this time, surely?"

"No, he has not—at least, your daughter says so. Well, now, stop—don't run away; just listen to me!"

"I am listening."

"Well, then, in as few words as you can, and as quietly as you can, give me a description of that gentleman's appearance."

The landlord endeavoured to comply.

But he made a sad bungle of it.

"Hush!" said the officer, sinking his voice to a still lower tone. "Keep quiet—I don't want to raise an alarm. Just say whether he agrees or not with this description."

The officer pulled a bill out of his pocket, and folding it in the middle, began to read.

Scarcely had the first words passed his lips, however, than he was interrupted by a prodigious clatter—a noise that drowned every other sound.

"Goodness gracious alive!" ejaculated the landlord, staggering back—"what on earth is that?"

The officers, all startled by the noise, looked around, for it seemed to them it had actually been made in the very room in which they sat.

"What's on the other side of that partition?" roared the officer, thrusting the bill back into his pocket.

"Why, the best parlour."

"The best parlour?" he yelled. "Ten thousand devils! That's where the gentleman was, I suppose? Of course it is, and now he is escaping. But quietly, my lads—let us take it quietly! We have him—there's no occasion to trouble! Briggson is outside, and he will be after him, depend upon it!"

Just as he uttered these words, the loud report of a pistol made itself distinctly heard.

CHAPTER CMXXXIV.

IN WHICH TOM KING FINDS HE IS UNABLE TO SHAKE OFF HIS PURSUERS.

It was indeed from the best parlour in the inn that the tremendous clattering noise had come, and the cause of it was this.

When our old friend saw the police officer produce the bill and unfold it, he judged it was high time to be off; in fact, he believed that the very best thing for him to do under the circumstances was to beat as hasty a retreat as possible.

But there is such a thing as making too much haste, as Tom found to his cost, for in stepping from the chair on to the table he placed his foot much too near the edge of the latter, the consequence of which was that before he knew what was the matter the whole affair had overbalanced, and he was lying on the ground with the furniture upon him.

A cry of vexation escaped his lips at this untoward accident.

It would at once let the police officers know that he was on his guard and preparing to escape.

Scrambling to his feet, he scarcely knew how, he made a rush to the window.

From mere habit more than anything else, he had previously made himself acquainted with the nature of its fastenings, so that now he was able to fling it open quickly and easily.

To spring into the roadway was but the work of a second; and then, knowing perfectly well where his horse had been posted, he ran off in that direction.

Before he had gone many steps, however, he was challenged, and a voice commanded him to stop.

It was not likely that he would pay any attention to any such command as this, and so continued his course, if anything, with slightly-increased speed.

Then the man who had challenged him—being no

other than Briggson, the officer, who had been put there on the look-out—deemed himself justified in producing his pistol and discharging it at the flying figure.

Tom felt the bullet whistle past him, or fancied he did; but he heard the report of the firearm, and so he knew he was safe.

At that very moment he gained the stable door.

Never, probably, had a horse been got ready and mounted in so short a space of time as Tom's was now.

But the fact was, however, in the morning, when attending his steed, he had requested that the saddle might be left upon his back, doing no more than loosening the girths.

The bridle had been hung upon a hook close by.

Tom seized this bridle, and, without waiting to put it on, and without pausing either to tighten the saddle-girths, he vaulted into the saddle, providing himself with no other means of guiding his horse than the halter by which he had been secured to the manger.

Owing to these rapid and energetic proceedings, Tom was enabled to get outside the stable almost before Briggson had made up his mind whether he had hit the fugitive or not.

Still, the police officers had poured out from the inn, and were hastening as fast as their legs could carry them to another large shed, lying more at the rear of the inn, which had been rapidly turned into a stable on their arrival, for, as may be supposed, in a place of so little trade there was not accommodation for so many horses.

They saw him take his departure, and gave vent to a loud cry, as though to express their determination to give him full chase.

Tom, however, paid no attention to them, but hurried off.

He quickly found, though, that, practised as he was in the art of riding, it was by no means easy to keep the saddle in its proper place.

Having, then, gained a trifling start, he thought he might venture to pause while he made himself and his steed more comfortable.

Accordingly, he alighted, tightened the girths, pulled off the halter, and substituted the bridle.

These operations occupied only a few fleeting moments, yet the police officers were enabled in the meanwhile to mount and to commence the chase in good earnest.

Tom, however, now felt but little apprehension.

He was convinced that his new horse was a good one, and now that he had had so long a rest and been well provided with food, he would be in excellent condition for the road, and capable of making any amount of exertion that might be required of him.

In accordance with his usual habit, Tom King took to the fields. He had found by experience that riding across the country afforded him a much better chance of shaking off his pursuers than confining himself to the high-roads and lanes.

But from time to time he turned in the saddle and looked behind him, and each time that he did so he saw that the officers were unpleasantly close behind him.

He put his horse to increased speed, and coming to a very high hedge, made him leap over it.

The animal seemed nervous, for it shied and swerved, but Tom was resolute, and forced him to rise.

It was unfortunate, however, for the animal barely cleared the obstruction, and coming down awkwardly, slipped and fell upon its side, carrying Tom with it.

But the highwayman, though he released his feet from the stirrups, kept firm hold of the bridle, and was on his feet as soon as the horse was.

The noble creature trembled and shook all over.

Whether it was injured or not by the fall Tom could not tell, nor dare he pause to ascertain.

Once more springing into the saddle, he plunged the spurs deeply into his flanks.

The horse staggered at first, and then broke out into full gallop, showing pretty clearly that whatever injury he might have received was not of a very serious character.

"I rather think," said Tom, as he noted the length and uniform height of the hedge, "that that will be a slight obstruction in the way of my friends behind. But for my fall, I should have got clear of them easily."

As may be imagined, however, the delay this sudden fall occasioned enabled the officers to get much nearer.

Upon arriving at the hedge they pulled up by common consent. Not one felt inclined to run the risk of leaping over it.

"Quick!" said the one in command. "Speed will do it now, after all. Get your cutlasses and cut away these branches. It won't take a moment to make a gap large enough for us to pass through one at a time. Now, then, set to work!"

Long before he had finished giving his directions, one of the men had alighted, drawn his cutlass, and commenced an attack upon the hedge.

His weapon was sharp and his arm strong, and it was surprising to find what havoc he made among the closely-growing twigs.

A gap was soon made—not exactly large enough for the horses to walk through, but still such a one as they could leap over easily; and as soon as this was the case, the one in command cried:

"That will do, Parker—that will do now; up into the saddle, and all of you follow me."

He set the example of making his way through the gap, and the others followed without loss of time.

Tom King was not a little disconcerted when, on turning round again, he found that the officers had so easily overcome the obstruction.

He had hoped that they would be obliged to ride along the hedge until they came to a part low enough to allow them to leap over.

Still he did not despair, for he had a pleasant piece of country before him, and he did not doubt that in the long run he should tire out his pursuers.

Nevertheless, he wished to get the chase over as quickly as was possible, and so urged his horse to the utmost, for he was fearful that the animal would in a short time begin to feel the effects of his fall.

Yet it was vexations, and in spite of all his exertions and efforts, the police officers kept about the same distance in the rear.

They did not gain on him in the least, nor did they lose ground.

There was a dogged obstinacy about this chase which made Tom King feel rather uncomfortable.

It was so palpable that the officers were determined to hold on in pursuit until they effected his capture.

For nearly as far as he could see the country round was as smooth and level as a bowling green, not affording him any chance of doubling upon them, or to put into execution any manoeuvre whatever.

He was thus compelled to resort to his original expedient, namely, that of making the best speed in his power.

It was while things were in this unsatisfactory state that Tom King suddenly found on the other side of a hedge before which he halted the broad turnpike road.

Looking to the left, and seeing a white gate only a few yards off, he walked his horse towards it, preferring to do this rather than run the risk of another leap.

The difference in time was really not very great.

He closed the gate behind him, remounted, and then looked up and down on the opposite side, hoping to find a similar means of entering the next field.

Nothing of the kind presented itself, however, and as it would not do to linger, he turned in the direction that would lead him away from London, and continued his hasty flight, resolved, however, that the moment he caught sight of a gate that he would pull up and pass through it.

To his annoyance, however, he failed to see any gate whatever.

The officers finding that the object of their pursuit was hurrying along the high road, changed their course slightly.

Instead of riding direct for the gate through which Tom had passed, they took a diagonal direction, which would serve to cut off a very large corner indeed.

It did so; and Tom shortly afterwards had the additional mortification of discovering that the officers had gained very much upon him.

He saw a gate, but he felt it would be madness to stop now and attempt to pass through.

There was no resource save that of continuing his wild flight along the highway.

All at once, passing round a bend in the road, he perceived before him a small covered cart, the driver of which carefully drew out of his way.

Little did Tom suspect that in this cart was seated his old companion Dick.

Had any immortal being whispered such a thing in his ears he would have received the intimation with incredulity.

Amid the clattering sound produced by his horse's feet on the hard road, Tom fancied he distinguished another sound like a cry of startled surprise.

But he had no time to think about this, but bent all his energies to urging forward his horse at his utmost speed.

But as he was now out of sight of his pursuers, and as he could perceive before him a gate, Tom gradually relaxed his speed, and then dismounted.

The gate was locked, but a couple of good, smashing blows with a heavy stone that lay close at hand, demolished the padlock, and allowed him to pass through.

Tom crossed this field, and then the next, then paused.

He looked behind him.

To his surprise, he no longer saw his foes, and at this circumstance he wondered greatly.

He little knew the service Dick had rendered him by sending the officers across the country in the wrong direction.

But although the officers were not within sight, Tom did not feel satisfied to remain so close to them, and continued on his way until he was again brought to a stop by a tall hedgerow.

He paused when near it, and at the same moment he heard a voice exclaim:

"There he is—there he is, over in the meadow! Quick—quick! Run on and open the gate! We are close upon him!"

Now, these sounds were not a little bewildering to Tom King, for, of course, he imagined that those words were uttered by one of the officers who had given him such a long and persistent chase.

But the fact was, as the reader no doubt surmises, that these police officers were those under the immediate command of Jack Marshall himself, and whom Dick had left disputing with each other at the junction of the four cross roads.

At the first sight the officer who had called out had taken Tom King for Dick Turpin, which was a thing not unfrequently done, owing to the general resemblance there was between them.

Tom caught the alarm, and, turning his horse's head another way, began his flight afresh.

He was now growing terribly alarmed; he could not conceal the fact from himself.

Already his horse had had a long and wearying gallop, added to which he had met with a severe fall.

Now he was close to his foes again, all his previous exertions had gone for nothing.

It did indeed seem a disheartening state of things.

But Tom only gave way to this depression of spirits for about a moment.

Drawing a long breath and giving himself a good shake, he braced himself up, so to speak, and prepared to meet this fresh danger with which he was assailed.

The only thing which troubled him was the strangeness of the fact that the officers should be so close behind him when he believed them to be at a distance, for, strangely enough, the thought did not strike him that it was another party altogether.

Fortunately for him, the meadow he was now crossing was of unusual extent.

It was very level, and divided from another almost as large by a narrow, winding stream, or rather brook.

His horse leaped over this without any perceptible exertion, and Tom—by means of his voice, by doubling up the reins and using them as a whip, by spurring vigorously with both heels—endeavoured to stimulate his horse into making still greater speed, although the gallop he was then going at was of truly an alarming character.

CHAPTER CMXXXV.

TOM KING UNEXPECTEDLY BUT OPPORTUNELY ENCOUNTERS AN OLD FRIEND.

ONCE again, while going at this headlong gallop, Tom King turned his head over his shoulder and looked behind him.

He was then in no small degree rejoiced to find that he

had succeeded in placing a much greater distance between himself and his foes than he had dared to anticipate. Surely if anything was calculated to encourage him this was.

And so, with quite a feeling of exultation, he redoubled his efforts.

It really seemed, however, as though all things should on that night turn out vexatiously.

The ground suddenly began to rise, so that his horse not only went more slowly, but underwent much mere fatigue.

There was no other resource, however, than to keep on, and the highwayman endeavoured to console himself with the thought that when the summit of the hill was reached he would be able to make up for loss of time by the rapidity with which he should perform the descent.

And here in this case fortune favoured him, for the descent was much greater than he had been led to imagine.

Allowing the reins to fall unrestrainedly upon his horse's neck, he again goaded him to the utmost.

The danger of such a course as this must be apparent, but, then, all ordinary dangers were lost sight of under such exciting circumstances as these.

One false step, Tom was well enough aware, and down his horse and himself would go, and with such violence as would probably occasion insensibility, if not instant death.

But the false step was not made, and at the bottom Tom found a rather dense cluster of trees, through which he did not attempt to penetrate, however, but contented himself by simply skirting them—his object being to get out of the sight of his foes.

On the opposite side of these trees Tom King suddenly perceived a light.

It came into view so quickly that he was upon it almost instantly.

At the same time a man started up, as it appeared, from the earth, and raised his arms above his head.

Tom's horse stopped and reared with so much suddenness that the highwayman was unhorsed.

The man, however, who had started up seized the frightened animal, and Tom King scrambled quickly to his feet.

"You were riding fast, stranger," said the man who had started up. "I was lying here, and did but move to save myself from being trampled upon by your horse's hoofs."

Tom King, breathless and exhausted, could not reply, but he endeavoured to climb into the saddle.

"You are spent and weary, stranger," continued the man. "You seem like one flying for his life. Your form looks familiar to me, too. Hi! Sebel!"—in a different tone of voice—"a light here—quickly!"

"Curse your light!" said Tom. "I want it not! Let go the reins!"

Before he had finished speaking, a light suddenly appeared in the darkness, and Tom could tell it was turned full upon his countenance.

"I knew it, stranger," said the man—"I felt certain we had met before! I do not break bread with so many strange faces as to be unable to remember them. I recollect you well."

"And there is something familiar in your voice," said Tom King, recovering his composure, and with the thought flashing upon him that this man might possibly be able to befriend him in no ordinary degree.

"Yes," continued the man, "it is long—very long since we met. You had then a companion with you, who rode a black steed of matchless quality. Do you remember now?"

"Yes, yes," said Tom—"quite well! You gave us both shelter and food at a time when we were sorely in need of both."

"And it seems that you are in fresh danger now?"

"I am," said Tom. "The officers of police are close behind me. They have given me a hard—a very hard chase, and every moment I expect to see them come into view."

At the very name of officers the gipsy ground his teeth savagely, and uttered an angry exclamation.

"No matter, stranger," he said. "The poor Zingari will again befriend you! Come with me, and fear not—

you're safe! Let the officers do what they may; they cannot find you!"

There was something so sincere in the tones of this man's voice, that Tom did not hesitate to trust and to believe him.

Moreover, on the former occasion, that he so well recollected, this man had been to them a most faithful ally.

He had nothing to fear from him in the shape of treachery, and just then his position was so bad that it could not possibly be worse, and consequently there was all the more chance of making it better.

These reflections did not take Tom King a moment to make, and he suffered him to lead him onwards in the darkness, for the boy Sebel had extinguished or hidden the light.

Tom soon found that he was descending into a kind of dell, at the bottom of which a fire was blazing.

It was, indeed, the light that he had first perceived.

Round this were grouped, in various picturesque attitudes, some ten or a dozen gipsies, male and female.

They were all anxiously on the look-out, and wondering what had happened.

"A friend," said Tom's conductor, briefly. "He requires shelter and concealment. Draw out the waggon quickly! There, that will do well. Stranger, come this way."

A large covered waggon, or rather cart, that had been backed close up against one side of the dell, was drawn away from its position, and the gipsy, leading Tom forward, showed him an indentation in the soil, looking like the entrance to a cavern.

"Enter," he said—"enter quickly; it is a small chamber, yet large enough to conceal you and your horse. Be quick; we will push the waggon back, and assume careless attitudes; then, if the officers appear, they will behold nothing suspicious."

"But should they search?" said Tom, who by no means relished shutting himself up in such a place.

"It is not likely," said the gipsy. "You leave that to us. If you are in any danger of discovery we will arm ourselves, and stand up in your defence. If we can do no more we will cover your retreat; but believe me, when I say again you have nothing to fear. In—in quickly!"

Almost against his will Tom was pushed into the little indentation we have mentioned, and his horse also.

Then, with great nimbleness and dexterity, the gipsies pushed the covered cart back in such a manner that his hiding-place was altogether concealed.

The gipsy calculated that the existence of such a place would never be suspected, consequently that Tom would be quite safe.

Whether he was right or not would be quickly put to the test, for his quick ears detected the dull thud produced by the concussion of many horses' feet upon the turf.

"Now, then, round the fire, all of you. Sit quietly, and remember if we are questioned, that we have seen nothing—heard nothing."

Scarcely had these instructions been carried out than the police officers arrived at the brink of the dell.

They came upon the place very unexpectedly, and were very near galloping into it.

They reined up their horses in good time, however, and seeing the lights, called out in loud tones.

The gipsies gave a responsive cry, and then the police officers, finding that the descent was practicable, began to make their way down one side of the dell.

In a few minutes they halted near the fire.

"Hullo!" cried one of the gipsies.

The appearance of the police officers caused considerable consternation among the gipsies, part of which was feigned, and part real.

"Have you been here long?" asked the officer.

"Since sunset."

"And have you seen anyone or heard anyone pass by—a man mounted on a horse, and going at full gallop?" He was responded to by a general negative; and the gipsy who had hidden Tom King said:

"The silence of this place has not been disturbed, but there is something in the air of it which proclaims that it is no place for us. When you arrived, we were consulting as to whether we should strike our tents and now or wait till daylight."

These answers were given with so much calmness and presence of mind that the officers were quite deceived.

To Tom's inexpressible satisfaction, they rode away; but before the summit of the dell was reached, one of the officers who rode nearest to Jack Marshall said:

"I hope, sir, you do not pay any particular attention to what those fellows said; they will tell more lies in a minute than a hawker could in a day."

"I don't believe them, as a general thing," said Jack Marshall, thoughtfully, "but yet they would know better than deceive us in such a case as this. Rely upon it, he has galloped past."

"But where has he gone?" said the officer, glancing around him, for by this time they had reached the level of the meadows. "I can see for a long, long distance, but there's not a trace of him."

Jack Marshall was silent for a moment or two, and then he said:

"These people are cunning."

"Very," assented the officer.

"Then we will meet cunning with cunning. Half of our number, headed by yourself, shall remain here. Search well. In the meantime I and the rest will keep up the pursuit."

"Agreed!" was the reply. "And if he is hidden anywhere about here, Mr. Marshall, rely upon it I shall be the one to unkenel him."

As Jack Marshall elected which men should accompany him, there was no difficulty nor delay in making a separation, and really without any particular loss of time one-half were going at full gallop across the meadow.

Now, had not these remarks been overheard by the gipsy who had so befriended Tom, our friend's position might have become critical.

Yet even now he was in a very dangerous predicament.

The gipsy was aware that only half the officers had taken their departure; but then he doubted much whether the highwayman was in possession of that knowledge, and he remembered also that he had forgotten to give Tom a caution not to move until he came to tell him all was well.

Thoughtfully and silently the gipsy made his way down into the dell again, and having reached the bottom, he began to give orders that the whole troop should get ready to depart.

He gave the command in a loud voice, then told his companions in an undertone to make as much flourish or display as they could over their preparations, but by no means to depart hastily.

This, of course, was done for the purpose of misleading the officers, and it produced a very tolerable effect, for the one who had remained in charge of this second party began to fancy, after all, he was mistaken, and that Jack Marshall and the rest would have the credit of a capture.

Accompanied by much shouting and talking, the horses were caught and harnessed to the different vehicles.

The tents were pulled up, the canvas folded, and, in a word, every preparation made for an immediate start.

This had been going on for more than half-an-hour, during which the officers had been looking keenly around them, when the one in command said:

"I am not satisfied about these gipsies yet. Come with me; let us go down. We will make a thorough search all through the dell."

His orders were obeyed immediately.

Some muttered discontented grumblings, for the fact was the officers who had to remain were very much annoyed at the event, they would have much preferred following Jack Marshall and the rest.

The gipsies affected to be surprised when the officers returned.

"Look here," said the one in command, "we are determined to stand no nonsense! We tracked our man close to this spot, and he has here most mysteriously disappeared. Now, we believe you to be in the secret; if so, and if you are wise, you will tell us at once, otherwise the consequences will be more serious than you think of."

"The Zingari has spoken," said the gipsy, "and you are welcome to search. In a few more moments we shall all have left the dell."

The officers began to search about in all directions, yet, as they did not come near the waggon, they found nothing of a suspicious character.

But Tom King began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

That confidence which he had felt in the gipsy had altogether departed, and most unquestionably, had there been any means whatever of making a dash from his hiding-place Tom would have done so.

But as the heavy waggon was backed up against him this was an impossibility, and so he had to remain quite still, and prepare himself for what was about to happen.

No place was left unsearched by the police, and at length they came to the covered waggon.

They looked around it; one even climbed up and stood on the shafts while he pulled aside the canvas flap in front and looked within.

The light of his lantern, however, rested only on the water-proof covering, for the opening at the back was concealed by the two flaps of canvas at the tail of the waggon, which were drawn closely across and tied together.

If the officer had entered the vehicle and pulled aside these flaps, Tom King must to a certainty have been discovered.

But he did not do so.

The thought that Tom King might be concealed behind never once occurred to him, nor was it likely that it should.

They moved off to a little distance, and then the gipsy, seizing Sebel by the arm, whispered in his ear:

"Crawl into the cavern and ask the stranger whether he thinks he should be able to creep into the waggon and to drag his horse in after him. If so, tell him all will be well. By that means we shall get him clear of the police officers, who, if I mistake not, intend to linger about this spot till daybreak."

The boy gave a nod to show that he understood thoroughly the purport of the hastily-uttered words, and gliding noiselessly away in the darkness, hastened to deliver his message.

CHAPTER CMXXXVI.

THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP A SHARP LOOK-OUT UPON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIPSIES.

THE gipsy who had so well befriended Tom King continued to stand watching the movements of the police officers.

After a brief whispered conference together, they quitted the dell; but did not go far away from it.

"You may say what you like," exclaimed one, "but I am more than ever of opinion that the man we want is not very far from here."

"Well, but where is he?"

The officer who had just spoken shook his head sagaciously, while at the same moment he pointed towards the gipsy encampment.

"It's my settled belief that those fellows yonder could answer that question if they liked, and if you would take my advice——"

"Well!"

"It would be not to leave off searching around, but at the same time to watch with all closely the movements of those varmint yonder."

"That is precisely what I had already made up my mind to do, so you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your advice for once in a way has been taken. Now, my lads," he added, "search around, and I will watch the gipsies."

The officers, however, set about their work very coldly.

Their failure to find any clue at all up to the present moment made them feel doubtful whether the highwayman was there at all. At any rate, they considered that those who had galloped off with Jack Marshall stood by far the best chance of making a capture.

In the meantime the boy Sebel had crept under the waggon and delivered his message to the highwayman, who said:

"I suppose, Sebel, he means to carry me away in the waggon?"

"Just so."

"Well, it is a plan as likely to serve me as any that I can think of, so I will make the attempt. Do you know whether the officers are far enough off to make it safe for me to try?"



[TOM KING LOSES HIS SECOND HORSE.]

"I think not; but when I creep under the waggon again I can soon tell."

"Then, if they are far enough off," whispered Tom, "just give a faint, low whistle. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Make haste, then!"

Sebol disappeared.

Tom King listened intently, and almost immediately the wished-for signal reached his ears.

Now on his own account he was not at all doubtful of his ability to get into the waggon, but as for his steed, that was another affair altogether.

He was quite a stranger to it, and knew not what its disposition might be.

But Tom relied to a very great extent upon the amount of sagacity which he knew all horses to possess.

He patted and stroked the creature for some minutes, No. 192.—BLACK BEAR

and was pleased to find that it perfectly appreciated his caresses.

Then, mounting into the waggon, Tom tied back the canvas flaps so as to leave the way clear.

Fortunately, the vehicle stood on low wheels.

Stooping down, the highwayman took hold of the bridle, and endeavoured to draw the horse up into the waggon.

But this was a failure, so he descended again; but, though he tried in a variety of ways, he could not succeed—the horse would not or could not understand him.

At this moment Tom became conscious that some one was near him, then a voice, which he recognised as belonging to the friendly gipsy, said:

"Is it too difficult?"

"I fear so."

"Then I'll tell you what you must do: You must make a bolt for it, and trust to the fleetness of your steed."

"I like that plan best. Where are the officers?"
 "Not far off; and yet so far that I think you have a reasonable chance of stealing away."

"Then I will try at all hazards."
 "Good! You cannot have a better chance than you have now."

"But, my friend," said Tom, "I must make you some recompense for what you have done. Now it is impossible, but we shall meet again, and then you will find I shall not be empty-handed."

"What I have done," interrupted the gipsy, "has been done willingly, and without desire for reward. The officers are my enemies, and I have treated them as such."

"Yes, yes," responded Tom, hastily—"I know very well all about that. Still, at the same time, it is my wish and intention to reward you for what you have done."

The gipsy bent his head submissively.

"At some future time," said Tom—"and I hope it will not be long distant—we shall meet again; then you will find that this will be about the best night's work that you have ever done."

"As you will," was the answer. "But there is no time to lose now upon matters of this kind. Are you all ready?"

"Quite."

"Then mount, and bend low down in the saddle, so as to prevent yourself as much as possible from being seen."

"Right!" said Tom, as he complied with this demand.

"If all is well," the gipsy added, in conclusion, "I will have the cart drawn a little on one side, in such a manner, understand, as to screen you from the observation of the police officers as much as I can. The rest I leave to you."

"You can do so safely," said Tom. "This brief rest will make all the difference to my steed. Besides, I have only half the number of foes to contend with."

Almost before Tom finished speaking the gipsy glided away.

A silence of some moments' duration then ensued, which was broken by the noise made in harnessing to the waggon.

At length the heavy vehicle was slowly drawn aside, and no sooner was there sufficient room to permit him to emerge than Tom did so.

The officers, however, were more on the alert than either the highwayman or the gipsies had given them credit for.

There was a sudden report from a pistol, and Tom felt his left arm suddenly fall nerveless to his side.

The reins fell upon his horse's neck.

He grasped them instantly with his right hand, and then used his spurs vigorously.

Away the horse went at full speed; but Tom heard loud shouts and cries in his rear, and, without looking back, he could tell that the officers were close behind him.

Keeping his horse's head still turned in the direction of the open country, Tom urged him onwards until, having got him to the very top of his speed, he let the reins fall upon his neck in order to ascertain the amount of injury the pistol bullet had inflicted.

The pain in his left arm was intolerable, and from the feel of it he came to the conclusion that the bone was broken.

Blood was flowing freely—so freely that if it was not checked at once its effects would soon be weakening to such a degree as to deprive him of all power to remain in the saddle.

As well as he could—for it was a difficult operation while going at so great a speed—Tom bound his handkerchief tightly round his arm.

The pain was by this proceeding much increased, yet, in his excitement, he scarcely heeded it.

It was some time before he could summon up sufficient courage to turn his head and look behind him.

He fancied that his pursuers were very close indeed upon his heels, so at last, with feelings of the greatest uneasiness, he gave one backward glance.

What was his satisfaction and intense surprise to find that his foes were far, far behind!

His steed had distanced them gallantly.

It was just at this time that he again came to a rather broad cross-country road, and as it was only divided from the meadows by a low hedge about twelve inches in height, he had no difficulty in gaining it.

This road he suddenly resolved to follow, with the intention of again taking to the fields at the first opportunity.

Then, suddenly, a faint cry reached his ears.

No doubt it had been a loud and lusty call, but distance had softened it down until it was little more than a murmur.

The moon was shining with tolerable brightness, and by its aid, on looking back, Tom saw the officers waving their arms in a most furious manner, and from time to time uttering a loud shout.

What could be the meaning of this proceeding, Tom, for the life of him, could not guess.

By their manner it would almost seem as though they were calling upon him to stop, yet such a thing as this was unlikely in the extreme.

It was not long, however, before this mystery was revealed.

The officers, not yet having reached the road, were at a rather higher elevation than the highwayman, and they were enabled to command a much greater extent of country.

They had perceived in the cross-road, at no great distance, a man engaged in driving one of those long, lumbering waggons used for the conveyance of huge pieces of timber.

Although he was so far off, the officers hoped that the stillness of the night would carry the sound of their voices to his ears, and they hoped as well to make him understand by sign what they meant.

There was just a chance that they might be successful, and no more, yet it was a chance well worth the trying, for since if they lost it they would be no worse off than before.

To their extreme satisfaction the man, who was trudging along by the side of the horses, stopped, and looked behind him.

Seeing this, the officers shouted and waved their arms again.

Evidently, however, the waggoner did not comprehend their gesticulations, nor would have done so had he not all at once heard the sound of horses' hoofs approaching at a rapid rate, and then immediately afterwards caught sight of Tom.

A being with an intellect more obtuse than this waggoner possessed could then have come readily enough to the conclusion that the officers wished him to intercept the fugitive.

Running with all speed to the head of his team, the waggoner caught hold of the bridles, and exerting his utmost strength, pulled the horses round in such a manner that the timber waggon was quickly turned broadside across the road.

Such was its length that the ends of the long poles brushed against the hedgerow on one side, while the points of the shafts came almost into contact with the trunk of a tree that grew opposite.

Tom saw this obstruction in his path, and instinctively slackened his horse's speed, though at first he did not guess what the waggoner was about to do.

All at once, however, he perceived how formidable a barrier there was to his further progress.

A loud cry, unmistakably one of exultation, next reached his ears.

It proceeded from the officers, who now made quite sure of their captive.

A high embankment was on each side of the road. The timber waggon was drawn across it, and so they felt that they had the highwayman in a trap.

Tom King quickly saw, however, that he had one chance—only one, and that a most desperate one—of escaping from his enemies.

It was to spur his horse onward again with all speed, and force him to leap the barricade.

Had it been his own horse, which he had so unfortunately lost, Tom would not have felt so much hesitation about making the attempt, but of the animal he now bestrode he knew scarcely anything.

It might be that such a desperate leap as that was in beyond its powers.

At the time, however, it can scarcely be said that these considerations presented themselves to Tom's mind.

On the contrary, rather, no sooner did he conceive this idea than he proceeded to put it into execution.

Uttering encouraging cries, and doing everything that lay in his power to incite his horse to put forth his utmost powers, Tom came on at full gallop to the waggon.

When within a short distance of it, however, the animal stopped suddenly, then swerved aside.

The highwayman's heart sank within him, but the mocking laughter that came from the lips of the waggoner and the police officers in their too-soon exultation at the success of his scheme made him furious, so, angrily tugging at the rein, he made his horse draw back again, and once more he put it to its utmost powers.

He used the spurs with a barbarity that no other circumstances could have excused.

One would have thought, however, to witness the behaviour of the horse, that the animal had gone for the first time merely in order to ascertain the nature of the leap it had to take, for on this second trial it rose gallantly in the air and just cleared the formidable barricade; its hind hoofs just scraped one of the upper poles, but that was all.

The ground was reached in safety.

Such a discordant yell of disappointment and rage as came simultaneously from the lips of all the police officers was surely never heard before.

It was now Tom's turn to exult, so, wheeling his horse round, he took off his hat and returned their mocking laugh.

So exasperated were the officers by this proceeding, that by common consent they pulled out their short, stumpy pistols, and discharged them.

A ridiculous proceeding, for they must have known full well Tom King was far out of their range.

And now this clever stratagem that they had caused to be put into execution told much against them.

Not one of the officers dreamed for a moment of attempting to overleap the waggon, so they pulled up and called to the waggoner to allow them to pass.

To turn the waggon round again, however, into its original position proved to be no easy task, for one of the wheels got fixed in some way, and for a few moments the vehicle was quite immovable.

The officers cursed, and swore, and behaved themselves more like madmen than sane beings.

But, as one might expect, that did not mend matters in the least.

In the meanwhile, Tom profited by this delay to the very utmost.

He knew the time was a most favourable one for him to make an effort, and he made it accordingly.

Before his foes were enabled to get once more fairly upon his track, he was not only out of sight but out of hearing also.

To come so near achieving their object, and then to miss it, was indeed aggravating in the highest degree, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that the police officers should lose their tempers under such circumstances.

But with dogged determination they kept steadily along the road, trusting to run down their prey in time.

Tom King no sooner found that he had fairly shaken them off than he reined in his steed to allow it a little rest after its recent exertions.

The pause thus made, too, enabled him to take a review of his position, and allowed him the opportunity of considering the nature of his future movements.

First, then, as to his position.

After an attentive contemplation of the objects around, the highwayman came to the conclusion that he was by no means so many miles away from London as he had imagined.

When he thought back upon his late adventures he could not wonder at his having been so hunted up and down the country.

Tracing back events, he could tell that very many times he had doubled upon his course, and altogether had taken a rather semicircular direction, the course of which tended towards the metropolis.

This settled, his chief consideration was where to remain during the time that had been agreed upon by himself and his companions.

So far the officers had been so vigilant and pertinacious that they had not allowed him to remain for any length of time anywhere, and even now, as the moon shone forth with great brilliancy and power, and revealed to him objects at a very great distance, he failed to perceive a place which held out the slightest promise of affording him the shelter he so much required.

Moreover, he remembered how ill-provided he was with funds, owing to the suddenness with which he had taken his departure from the inn.

There was no resource but to remedy this somehow or other, as it was impossible to say how soon circumstances might arise rendering it necessary that he should have command of money in order to purchase his safety.

Having reached this point, Tom listened again, but as yet no sound of his pursuers was audible.

His horse by this time had recovered his wind, and so, at a very gentle trot, Tom continued his course for a little way along the cross-road.

He did not pause, indeed, until he reached a spot where a narrow winding lane branched off.

To what place it led he knew not; but, by its appearance, it was evident that few travellers ever used it.

This would have made many turn aside, but Tom liked it all the better on that account.

So, turning his horse's head, he once more put the animal in rapid motion.

The course of this lane was most devious and uncertain, and, having journeyed along it for some little time, Tom lost his reckoning, and could not for the life of him tell whether he was proceeding north, south, east, or west.

Once, and only once, he caught sight of a human habitation, and that appeared to be a farm-house, lying back at some distance, and being almost buried by a dense mass of trees.

After more than half an hour's hard riding, Tom found himself at the end of the lane.

As he quite expected, it debouched upon the high-road.

At this spot trees were growing densely, and the shadows which they cast amply sufficed to screen him and his steed from all observation.

Therefore he paused once more to consider upon his proceedings, and also to listen for the approach of his foes.

The latter, however, proved a vain attempt, and the highwayman muttered:

"I have tired them out, that's certain, and I suppose I may look now for a few moments' peace. What shall be my next step?"

He checked himself abruptly, and listened again.

Very faintly, yet quite distinctly, came a dull, murmuring sound.

Tom knew it well.

A vehicle was coming along the high-road from the left hand at a very rapid rate, and, by the noise produced, it must be one of tolerable dimensions.

Almost at the same moment, he caught sight of two faint, star-like lights, creeping rapidly along, at no great distance from the ground.

"Shall I try my luck?" he muttered.

As he spoke, he drew forth one of his pistols, and examined it attentively.

"One would call it a piece of foolhardiness to attempt to stop any vehicle while the officers are thus at my back, but money is requisite, and who knows whether I shall have a better chance of obtaining any than I have now?"

He ceased, for by this time the vehicle was very close at hand, so close that Tom, by straining his eyes, was able to make out that it was a carriage drawn by four beautiful grey horses.

"After all," he said, as he rode quickly forward "it will be but the work of a few moments, and I shall be on my way again, without any interruption worth naming."

Just then, Tom pointed his pistol in the direction of the coachman, who was seated, half dozing, on the box, yet taking care to incline the barrel upwards to such a degree that the bullet would pass harmlessly above his head.

CHAPTER CMXXXVII.

IN WHICH TOM KING'S MISFORTUNES CONTINUE TO INCREASE.

"HALT!" cried Tom King, in a loud voice—"halt, I say! Stop—stop, if you value your life! Pull up this moment!"

Tom accompanied these words by seizing the bridle of one of the leading horses and pulling it vigorously, thus materially assisting the coachman in bringing the carriage to a standstill.

Tom King perceived, for the first time, that behind the carriage a footman was seated, and he began to think if there were many inside he should have rather long odds to deal with single-handed.

Therefore, almost without reflection, he put into execution a stratagem which had well served himself and his companions on many occasions.

The coachman, thoroughly terrified by Tom's words, and hearing the explosion of the pistol, sat trembling on his box, hardly certain whether he was alive or not.

Tom heard the window of the carriage let down with a sharp, crashing sound, but he paid no heed to the circumstance.

Turning his head round, as though addressing some one at the side of the road, he cried, in a loud voice:

"Understand me, my friends, I intend to manage this little affair single-handed. Do not fire, Claude, nor you, Jack, on any account, until I give you the signal—do not interfere until I call for your aid."

Having thus apparently settled this matter, Tom turned his horse's head round, and trotted easily and carelessly up to the door of the carriage.

He saw a slight movement within, and the faint light given from the cloud-obscured moon rested upon something glittering.

What it was he knew not, but he abruptly changed his course, and the next moment a pistol was discharged.

Not the slightest injury resulted from it, however, and, without perceptibly changing his course, Tom made his way to the door of the carriage.

He still held a pistol in his hand, which must have been seen, for the inmates of the vehicle shrank back.

At the same moment, a faint, half-smothered scream came upon his ears.

"I know not to whom I am indebted for that shot," said Tom King, coolly, "but let me state at once that I shall not forget the favour. Now, then, quick—you have money, and I want it! Surrender it to me quietly, and you may proceed upon your journey without any further danger or delay. If you refuse, you will only have yourselves to thank for the unpleasant consequences."

The interior of the carriage was quite dark, so that Tom was unable to see who it contained.

But he heard a sweet, pleasant voice say:

"Oh, papa, give him money—do not deny it—and let us ride on! Do not provoke him to violence."

"Hush—silence!" said another voice. "You know not what you ask. Any concession that I might make may be the signal for greater extortion; we should not be left with one article of value."

"Make the trial," said Tom. "Gold is all that I require. Time is pressing, and I am anxious to depart."

"Then," said the same voice, in firm tones, "I am determined to defend what I have with my life; so now beware!"

"I regret to hear you say as much," said Tom.

"Regret it?"

"Yes, because it will force me to extremities."

Just then Tom looked up, and found himself menaced by a danger which he had never for a moment taken into account.

In fact, he had believed that the words he had uttered would be quite sufficient to deter the coachman and footman from making any movement whatever.

But in this he was mistaken.

The footman, with a surprising amount of boldness, considering that he had no weapon of defence but a long wand or staff, had climbed slowly from his seat behind on to the roof of the carriage.

Then, suddenly drawing himself up to his full height, he raised the staff above his head, with the intention of

bringing it down with his utmost force upon the head of the highwayman.

But Tom saw his danger, though only just in time to save himself.

Quick as thought, he pulled the rein so suddenly and violently that the horse, in turning round, rose up for an instant on its hind legs.

At this same instant of time, another pistol was discharged from the interior of the carriage.

The footman, being in the act of delivering the blow, could not save himself.

He had put forth his utmost strength, intending that the one blow should be effectual.

Therefore, the staff passing through the air with great swiftness, and not meeting with the impediment he had calculated upon, overbalanced him, so that he fell with great violence into the roadway.

This event was scarcely noticed by Tom, for, to his surprise and consternation, his horse staggered for a second or so, and then fell down as though struck by an invisible hand.

He had barely time to disengage himself from the stirrups, and so save himself from an awkward fall.

The fact was, the bullet from this second pistol had lodged itself somewhere in the horse's head at the moment when the animal raised itself upon its hind legs in turning round.

For the second time, then, Tom King found himself deprived of a steed.

The gentleman in the carriage, seeing what had happened, though greatly bewildered by the rapidity with which these events had taken place, now called out:

"Drive on, coachman—drive on with all speed! Don't spare the lash, and we shall outstrip the rascal easily!"

"But John," said the coachman, who thought more of his fellow-servant than the gentleman appeared to do. "Don't you see that John, sir, has fallen headforemost into the road? Can you leave him where he is?"

"Confound you, yes!" was the reply. "He can shift for himself! Drive on, I say—drive on!"

"No, coachman!" said Tom, who had by this time recovered himself. "You had better not attempt to move—that is, if you have the least regard for your life!"

While speaking, Tom King advanced, and the coachman, seeing him, shrank down, and covered his face up with his hands.

He could not bear to look upon the death-dealing weapon that was pointed so menacingly at him.

Tom had a purpose in all his movements, and it was quickly carried out.

Thrusting his pistol into his belt, he drew his sword, and with the sharp, glittering weapon, instantly severed that portion of the harness that connected the leading horse nearest him to the others.

It was a magnificent creature, though it showed signs of being greatly terrified.

Quickly sheathing his sword, Tom hastened to pat it upon the neck, and so quiet it.

Again producing his pistol, he laid it upon the ground, first having satisfied himself that it was in readiness for immediate use.

"Now, sir," he said, addressing the occupant of the carriage, "whoever you may be, let me bid you to beware! You have had two shots at me, but, for your own life's sake, do not try a third, or try in any way to interrupt me in what I am about."

Tom did not wait to see whether due attention was given to his words or not, but with remarkable dexterity stripped off the trappings belonging to the grey horse.

Having done so, he stooped down, and in the course of a few moments transferred the saddle and bridle from the dead steed to this new one.

Then, vaulting into the saddle, he again placed himself beside the carriage door.

"Do not say I have not treated you with forbearance," were Tom's first words. "But perhaps you know scarcely any act will tempt me to offer violence? Understand me, however, that I will be trifled with no longer! Your money I must and will have! Better give it to me than compel me to take it from you!"

"Why, curse your impudence!" said the gentleman, "are you not content with what you have already? This is too good a joke! Have I lived to see a rascal mount one of my horses, and then demand my purse?"

"That was your act," said Tom. "My own horse you destroyed. But come, I have no time for talk!"

"Oh, papa," said the other voice, though this time Tom could tell that the young girl was struggling with her tears, "do give him the money—it can make little difference to you!"

"It does not," was the reply. "Here, fellow, take this, and be content! I have resisted you as well as I could. I would have done more, but, like a fool, I trusted myself with one brace of pistols only, though, if I had ammunition with me, rely upon it you would not have got off so easily."

While these words were spoken, a purse was tossed with a disdainful action out of the carriage.

Tom dexterously caught it.

"Thanks," he said—"thanks! I have what I require! I daresay you will find it rather awkward with three horses, but you have only yourself to blame for that. Had you complied with my demand at first, all this would have been saved!"

"Oh, look—look!" cried another voice, which Tom King had not yet heard—"oh, look—look! Here are officers close at hand! Help—help—oh, help!"

The last word was pronounced with a shrill, sharp intonation.

Tom was quite surprised to hear it, for he had fancied that the carriage was tenanted by two persons only.

The fact was, a lady was present, the mother of the young girl who had spoken, but at the first approach of danger she had either fainted or pretended to do so, recovering only just at the moment when she saw succour at hand.

The officers she had seen were those who had been so long in pursuit of Tom.

They had kept resolutely upon his track, and just then emerged from the shady entrance to the lane.

They had approached very gently, having made their minds up only a moment before to give up all further thoughts of making Tom a prisoner.

The lady's voice aroused them, and one glance enabled them to comprehend the position of affairs.

Tom King knew well enough what had occurred, though he could not see the officers, the carriage being between himself and them; and, not waiting another moment, he wheeled suddenly round, and tested the quality of his new horse by putting him to overleap a rather high wooden fence.

The obstacle was cleared in beautiful style.

"Over the palings yonder!" shouted the gentleman, leaning out of the carriage window, and addressing the officers. "There he goes at full speed over the meadow!"

"All right!" cried a voice, in reply. "We'll have him—we're bound to have him!"

"Nothing of the sort," ejaculated the gentleman, with a rattling oath—"nothing of the sort! The rascal is mounted on the very best and fleetest horse in my stables, and will defy such animals as you have underneath you!"

The officers paid but little attention to his words, though, with surprising boldness, they one and all attempted to clear the fence.

Only about half their number succeeded—the remainder fell ignominiously on the other side.

The manner in which the grey horse had cleared the fence let Tom King know what he might expect from such a creature, and, taking all things into account, he had really matter for congratulation, since he had been greatly the gainer by the exchange that had been made.

On looking back, he saw to what a small number his pursuers had been reduced, and so, with a loud, defiant cry, he waved his hat, and the next moment was hurrying along at the utmost speed his new horse was capable of making.

For the officers to attempt to keep up the chase was quite ridiculous.

Success could not be hoped for.

Their horses were much jaded by the long journey they had performed, while Tom's was comparatively fresh.

In a much shorter space of time than he had dared to believe possible, Tom King found himself once again clear of his troublesome foes, and this time he trusted to remain so.

"Bravo!" he said, as he patted the magnificent steed upon the neck—"bravo! If you only turn out according to my expectations, I shall consider you not far inferior to Black Bess herself!"

Tom King had been speaking in a light-hearted, joyous tone, but as he proceeded the accents of his voice changed entirely, and when he ceased speaking a cry of pain escaped his lips.

The way in which he pressed his hand to his left arm told eloquently what was the cause of it.

"I had forgotten my arm," he said—"quite forgotten it until now! Well, that must be a sign that the injury is by no means so great as I thought at first. But, oh! this pain! It is more than I can bear!"

The bandage still remained in its place, though it had become deeply tinged with blood.

"I should have attended to it earlier," he continued. "But no matter! I seem to be quite alone."

He raised himself in the saddle while he spoke these words, and took a comprehensive glance around him.

He was enabled to do so tolerably well, for, mingled with the faint, sickly-looking moonlight, came the first beams of a new day.

So far as he could see, no living creature of any description met his gaze.

His eyes rested at length upon a large, smooth sheet of water, the surface of which was not broken by the tiniest ripple.

Towards this he bent his way, and, having reached its margin, dismounted.

His horse drank eagerly at the pool, and Tom then slowly and carefully removed his temporary bandage.

As he did so, a dreadful feeling of faintness and giddiness came over him.

He tried to struggle against it and overcome it, but in vain—he felt that all things were sliding from him.

The ground slipped suddenly from beneath his feet—he felt himself falling, but he knew not where.

Just then came a blank, for, ere he fell at full length beside the water, he was quite insensible.

How easy a prey the highwayman would have been just then had the police officers been a little closer!

He could not have offered the slightest resistance to them.

But Tom was oblivious of all things, and so, of course, being in danger was one of them, and he lay there calmly and peacefully enough until the first rays of the rising sun shone upon his face.

CHAPTER CMXXXVIII.

TOM KING UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

WITH a hurried start, and with a sensation of great pain, Tom King recovered possession of his faculties.

Slowly, and with much difficulty, he raised himself slightly, and looked around.

A kind of misty film was before his eyes and before his memory, so that some time elapsed before he could make out by what objects he was surrounded, or by what train of events he had reached that spot.

At length all became clear, and, creeping forward, he stooped down, and drank heartily of the clear water.

Its beneficial effects were immediately apparent.

New life and vigour filled his frame, while the fever of delirium that had gathered partially about his brain was dissipated also.

He gave another and clearer look around.

No human being could be seen—nor, indeed, any living creature whatever, save his new horse, which was grazing peacefully enough at a little distance.

Taking off his coat, Tom next proceeded to ascertain as well as he could the precise amount of injury he had received.

He was terribly afraid a bone had been fractured, but he was not long in coming to the conclusion that this fear was unfounded.

There was a very ugly wound, however, in the fleshy part of his arm, which from his wrist to his shoulder presented a very red and inflamed appearance.

But the bleeding had almost ceased.

And now he set to work to bathe it well in the clear cold water.

He soon felt the benefit of this treatment, and having remained as long as he thought prudent for his safety in that place, he bound up his arm as skillfully as he was able, and resumed his coat.

When he tried to stand, however, he became more fully aware of the extent to which he had been weakened.

He staggered, and could scarcely save himself from falling.

By one of those powerful efforts of the mind which will at times entirely control the corporeal functions, he succeeded in banishing this deathlike sensation.

He hastened to his horse, but the animal hearing his approach looked up and then moved off.

Evidently it had no desire to be caught.

Tom's heart sank again when he noted the vast extent of the meadow.

He knew it would require far more strength and endurance than he possessed to recapture his horse.

For a little while he was almost inclined to give up in despair, which circumstance will show better than anything else how much loss of blood had reduced him.

Advancing slowly and with caution, and using such soothing expressions as he was able to think of, he again crept nearer to his horse, and at length succeeded in taking hold of the bridle.

To mount was a difficult process, but he accomplished it, and then hesitated as to the way he should take.

Shelter and rest somewhere he felt were more than ever needed.

Surgical assistance also was required, though where he could obtain any of these he had not the slightest idea.

"I must trust to chance to guide me," he muttered. "I have no better counsellor at the present time. I must congratulate myself upon having so well got rid of the police officers."

As he uttered these last words he set his steed in motion, following the course which he had taken in flying from his pursuers.

A ride of rather more than a quarter of an hour brought him to the summit of a hill, from which a tolerably extensive prospect could be obtained.

One habitation, and one only, was in sight.

This was a large, substantially-built mansion, whose very antiquity gave it an air of the greatest picturesqueness.

Ivy and other parasitic plants had taken possession of nearly every wall, and around it were many stately trees, every one no doubt many hundreds of years old.

The loud cawing of some lazy-winged rooks alone disturbed the silence, but this sound only served to make the general air of peace and quiet that reigned around the more apparent.

Tom King stopped his horse in order to gaze upon this structure, and as he gazed he sighed.

It may be that the sight of it brought back to his recollection some memory of the past, or it might be that he thought how welcome a shelter would those substantial walls afford.

Be this as it may, however, it is certain an intense longing came over him to make his way towards that dwelling.

Strangely enough, he felt a presentiment that he had only to present himself at its portal to be made welcome.

This and other fancies came crowding thickly upon him, but he shook them off as one might shake off the recollection of some dream, and prepared himself to look the difficulties of his situation fairly in the face.

Not for another moment did he contemplate the idea of making his way anywhere in the direction of that mansion.

He turned his horse's head, indeed, in such a direction that it was quickly lost to view.

After a brief space he found himself close to the side of a narrow but well-kept road.

A thickly-planted hedge alone divided him from it.

Before venturing to pass this obstruction, Tom thought it would be no more than prudent to listen.

In his present position he could not be over cautious, for he was now unfitted for a long, fatiguing ride.

Pausing, then, he listened with great intentness, and

soon had good cause to congratulate himself upon the course he had adopted.

Scarcely a second elapsed before the faint but perfectly clear and distinct sound of horses' feet reached him.

He continued to listen, and as the sound grew louder he could tell that a single horseman was approaching.

From a single horseman surely he had nothing to fear, and so he might have continued on his way.

But, then, it was important he should keep out of sight, and so he resolved to wait until this traveller had passed by.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial, for the approaching horseman came on at a sharp pace until he got within a few yards of where Tom was concealed, and then he gradually checked his horse.

The hedge of which we have spoken was so high and grew so thickly that Tom felt perfectly certain he had but to remain stooping down in the saddle in order to be perfectly invisible to any person who might pass by.

This, then, was the position that he took up, though, nevertheless, he was able to obtain a tolerably good view of the road beyond.

Peering through the interstices of the hedge, he quickly saw a man dressed in a kind of livery make his appearance.

He was mounted on a splendid horse, and over one shoulder was a strap, to which was attached a large leather bag.

There was an expression of cunning and villainy in this man's face that Tom perceived at once, and, in consequence, he felt a deep and immediate interest in all this man's proceedings.

He continued to rein-in his steed until he brought it to a standstill at a spot not many yards distant from where Tom was hidden.

This done, his next proceeding was to draw the sleeve of his corduroy coat across his face.

"It seems all quiet enough," he muttered, half to himself and half aloud, "and yet I heard something, too; but it must have been my fancy—yes, yes, my fancy. I wonder what there is I could hear to be afraid of?"

He looked around him with a half-defiant expression, which was strange enough to see, and which greatly increased the amount of curiosity and interest the highwayman already felt.

Nor did the man's succeeding actions serve in any degree to diminish these feelings.

Allowing the reins to fall upon the neck of his horse, he carried one hand to the leather bag that has been mentioned, and brought it round until it rested on the pommel of the saddle.

When it was in this position, Tom could see it plainly, and had no doubt whatever as to its character.

It was such a leather bag as would be used for the purpose of carrying letters to and from a post-office.

The man hesitated, and seemed to tremble.

Then, with a quick movement, he thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and produced a small key.

He gave another suspicious glance about him before he ventured to introduce it into the lock.

A sharp click followed, for the key turned with difficulty, as though it was a false one, and then the bag was opened.

Eagerly and rapidly, the man drew forth a handful of letters.

He glanced at them quickly, and selecting one, placed the others back again in their receptacle.

"That's it!" he muttered, glancing at the superscription of the one he held—"I would swear to the handwriting, although so many years have passed away since I saw him last. Curses on him! He shall rue the day when he first made up his mind to interfere with my designs."

He placed his fingers near the seal, then listened once more and glanced about him.

The silence that prevailed reassured him, and the next moment the letter was torn open.

His eyes glanced rapidly over its contents, and as they did so such an expression of evil came over his forbidding countenance as made Tom King shudder to gaze upon.

With the same evil, threatening look, he thrust the

letter into one of his pockets; then closing the bag, he locked it again, and restored it to its former place.

This done, he dug his heels viciously into his horse's flanks, and in a moment was lost to Tom's view.

This sudden departure was something that Tom King had scarcely anticipated, or it is possible he might have tried to prevent it, though had he reflected upon his own weak condition he would scarcely have made so rash an attempt, for the man was of a powerful, muscular build.

But the incident was one which set Tom thinking, though all his thought did not enable him to arrive at any definite conclusion respecting it.

"It cannot be any concern of mine," he muttered, "and I am not in fit condition now to follow up the adventure, especially as it is broad daylight. No, no—I must push on, and find some place where I can lie down and rest."

He drew back a little way from the hedge as he spoke, and, glancing first to the right, then to the left, perceived a little gate that had hitherto escaped his notice.

Towards this he directed his horse's footsteps, and then, passing through it, gained the road.

Without a thought—indeed, quite unconsciously—he gazed in the direction the man had taken, and as he did so his attention was immediately arrested by the appearance of a small white object lying near the verdant bank on the summit of which the hedgerow had been planted.

A second glance showed him that this white object greatly resembled a letter, and, impelled by curiosity, he walked his horse slowly towards it.

He soon found this conjecture verified—a letter most certainly it was.

There was little difficulty in guessing by what means it had reached there.

The man, in pulling the others out of the bag, had allowed this one to fall.

It was small, and had fluttered to the ground unnoticed.

Tom dismounted, and, picking up the missive, glanced at the address.

He had some little difficulty in making it out, for the handwriting was a straggling one, and the paper had become soiled by contact with the road.

The following words, however, he managed to decipher:

"Sir Ralph Cromer, Wilfrs Cross."

"Wilfrs Cross?" he muttered, repeating the last words. "I wonder where that may be? Surely close at hand. No doubt the house I saw a little while ago."

This was a probable enough conjecture, seeing that there was no other habitation visible for miles.

Tom lapsed into an attitude of deep reflection, during which his eyes were fixed upon the letter, though in reality he saw it not.

"It may be," he murmured at last, "that this is a favourable chance thrown in my way. Who can tell? The question is, shall I avail myself of it?"

He glanced down at his disordered dress while he spoke; then set to work to improve its appearance as well as he could, from which it may be inferred that he had come to a decision.

The letter he had placed carefully and securely in his breast pocket, and, when all his preparations were completed, he remounted his steed.

Following the route already taken by the dishonest servant, he made his way along the road, which he was not long in finding was a private one, leading only to the mansion he had seen, and towards which he had felt so mysteriously attracted.

"Surely," he thought, as he rode slowly onwards, "the service I shall render them is of some importance. The chances are that they will never recognise me, then surely it would not be too much to ask for a little aid and shelter. Could they possibly refuse such an appeal?"

A few moments afterwards, Tom found himself in front of some massive wooden gates, so high that he could not see over the top of them.

His approach evidently had been heard, for one half was slowly thrown open, and the form of a good-looking, middle-aged female made its appearance.

She curtsied respectfully to Tom, who, in answer to her inquiring gaze, said:

"I suppose this is Wilfrs Cross, is it not?"

"It is, sir," was the reply.

"The residence of Sir Ralph Cromer?" continued Tom.

"You are quite right—it is."

"Then I have business with you."

"Pray come in, sir," was the reply. "Follow this path, it will bring you to the front door of the hall. Sir Ralph is an early riser; you will no doubt find him at breakfast."

Tom tossed a guinea to the woman, and rode through the gates.

She was accustomed to receiving presents from the different visitors who passed by, but this was a greater amount than she had ever had before, and when Tom reached a bend in the avenue and looked back, he saw that she had not recovered from the effects of his munificence, for she was curtsying still.

The next turning brought Tom in view of the hall, which was a much more imposing structure than it had appeared to be from the distance.

A momentary hesitation came over him, for he began to think that it was really carrying the force of impudence too far to intrude himself into such an abode.

A sharp twinge of pain making itself felt at this moment changed the whole current of his thoughts, and so, with renewed confidence, he continued his course towards the mansion.

CHAPTER CMXXXIX.

TOM KING INTRUDES INTO A STRANGE HOUSEHOLD.

As Tom King drew nearer and nearer to the hall, the thought uppermost in his mind was how happy, peaceful and contented all its inhabitants must be.

To him, the quiet serenity of the scene around him struck him all the more forcibly when contrasted with his own violent, turbulent career.

A glimpse which he had through one of the large windows on the ground floor served to strengthen this impression.

He caught sight of a large fire burning briskly in the grate, and its bright rays were reflected with great brilliancy from the massive silver ornaments upon the table, and from the gold frames of the pictures against the walls.

He saw, too, that the table was spread for the morning meal, and that around it several persons were seated.

Once again he hesitated, but now hesitation came too late.

He had gone too far to retract, for his advent had been noticed by the occupants of the breakfast-room.

Half a dozen steps more brought him to the portico, where he dismounted.

Scarcely had his feet touched the ground than a servant approached, who took charge of his horse, and then the front door was thrown open, and an invitation given to enter.

Tom complied, and then said:

"I have particular and important business with your master. Tell him so. It is useless for me to give my name, as I am as great a stranger to him as he is to me."

The servant seemed rather unwilling to convey this message; but when Tom presented him with a gratuity his reluctance vanished at once.

"Sir Ralph is at breakfast," said the servant, "and as he is almost an invalid, he wishes you to enter at once, and make known your business to him."

Tom bowed acquiescence.

The hall was crossed, a door thrown open, and he found himself upon the threshold of the apartment of which he had caught so transient a glimpse.

At the first glance, he saw an elderly man, rather thin, with a slight fringe of short white hair around his head, seated in a capacious easy chair, engaged in looking at a letter.

At the head of the table sat a lady, much younger than Sir Ralph—young enough, indeed, to be one of his daughters.

But there was something in her confident, authoritative manner that made Tom immediately aware that she was mistress of the hall.

One other person alone was present.

This was a young girl of such rare beauty that Tom King bent before it in respectful admiration.

Naturally, Tom expected that the baronet would address him, and, indeed, the feeble old man seemed about to do so, but the lady at the head of the table, gazing somewhat scornfully at Tom, inquired:

"Well, sir, what may be your business? Be good enough to explain the meaning of your intrusion."

The words were uttered in sharp, cutting accents. Nothing certainly could be further from a welcome.

Tom bowed again, for he was not ready with his reply.

He had noticed several things which struck him as being strange.

In the first place, the lady who had spoken to him had her hand resting upon the letter-bag, from which, it appeared, that she drew forth the letters, opened them, read them first, then handed them to the baronet.

The second was, that this lady's countenance reminded him of a face that he had somewhere seen before.

Where, for a moment puzzled him.

But he quickly recollected.

In the contracted brow, the cunning expression of the eyes, the cruel lines about the mouth, he recognised a close resemblance to the man whose movements he had watched in the lane.

That man, however, evidently was a servant, and this lady was the mistress of the mansion.

Was the resemblance between them accidental, or were they really related?

It was easy enough for Tom to ask himself these questions and speculate upon them, but he had no means of arriving at any satisfactory reply.

"I trust," he said, after his brief and scarcely-noticeable hesitation—"I trust you will excuse this most unreasonable intrusion on my part; but, as I stated, I have called because I have particular business with Sir Ralph Cromer."

"Sir Ralph is here," said the lady, indicating the old man in the chair.

"Yes, I see it," said Tom, "but what I have to say is private—it concerns him alone."

"Ellen, my dear," said the lady, addressing the young girl, "you may leave the room."

"Pardon me," said Tom, "I fear you do not understand me. What I have to say is solely for Sir Ralph's ears."

The lady started angrily to her feet, and drew herself up erect.

"You make a great mistake," she said, in shrill, querulous tones, "if you think Sir Ralph has any secrets from me! No matter how private your communication may be, you must speak it in my presence. I am quite in the baronet's confidence, so hesitate no longer—speak at once."

Now, if Tom had been unwilling in the first place to speak in the presence of this lady, he was now ten thousand times more so.

His perceptions were all sharp and keen, and especially so on that morning.

An insensible something came over him that made him feel things were not going on as they should—that some evil influence was at work—an influence which he might be able to counteract.

He saw that the young girl looked pale, and sad, and suffering.

He saw that the baronet was wholly, both for good or for evil, under the dominion of his wife.

"You must really excuse me," said Tom, "if I beg to differ from your ladyship. It is not indeed a matter for me to judge. When I have made my communication to Sir Ralph, it will be for him to decide whether he acquaints you with it or not."

The lady's eyes flashed, and she stamped her foot angrily upon the ground.

"Speak out, sir," she said—"speak out and begone! We want no intruders here!"

Tom King bowed and then, in faint, trembling accents, the old man said:

"My dear—my dear, pray don't be so violent; there is no occasion for it—none indeed! But when you get so fierce and angry you terrify me—with such weak nerves as I have you terrify me to a degree!"

"Then," was the quick, stern answer, "if such is the case, bid this stranger disclose his errand—~~and~~ ^{and} all that is required."

"But, sir," said Tom with great respect, "I should prefer acquainting you with it alone."

"Well, well, so you shall. Why should he not, my dear? Let him have his own way, and I will tell you what he has said afterwards."

"No, sir," said the lady—"I demand that this subject be spoken out before me."

"Well, well, let it be so—let it be so."

Tom King looked with the greatest pity and distress at the poor old man who spoke these words.

It was dreadful indeed to think that any human being's mind should be so shattered—vacillating.

"I regret this," Tom said, breaking the silence—"I regret this very much indeed; but I can assure you my instructions are so peremptory, that if I do not deliver my message to Sir Ralph in private I must depart with my errand undisclosed."

This was a threat that made the lady hesitate a little.

She began to feel that Tom King was not one to bend and bow before her authority, and so, with quite a sudden change of demeanour, as though she had been struck by a fresh and sudden thought, she said:

"Very well, sir—very well! Since you choose to create dissension in a household by your obstinacy, and since you choose to act with so much discourtesy, I will oppose you no longer—you shall have your own way. You can remain here with Sir Ralph."

The young girl called Ellen had already left the breakfast-room, and now the baronet's wife, with a haughty, angry mien, walked hurriedly to the door, passed out, and closed it.

Poor Sir Ralph witnessed this act with the greatest surprise.

It was to him something unparalleled, and he began to look upon Tom with feelings very closely approaching awe.

"I trust you will pardon me, sir," Tom said, advancing more closely to him. "Perhaps when I come to tell you my errand you will think that I have made a needless fuss about it; if so I must entreat your forgiveness. Rest assured that all I have done has been with the best intent."

"Well, well, young man," exclaimed the baronet—"sit down there in that chair, and make yourself comfortable. Now, what have you to say?"

Tom sank his voice to a whisper.

"I am sadly afraid," he said, "that we shall be overheard."

"Oh, no, no—there is not any fear of that!"

"Excuse me, but I should like to satisfy myself upon that point," and, while he spoke, Tom King, with a light and rapid tread, crossed the room.

There was a look of great satisfaction on his countenance as he did so, for the fact was, he believed that he had come to the right conclusion as to the cause which had induced her ladyship so suddenly to alter her demeanour.

He paused a moment near the door, then, placing his finger on his lip, turned the handle softly.

At the same moment he pulled the door open with great suddenness, and closed it again with equal quickness.

A blundering sound, a sharp crack, and a stifled cry resulted.

"Ah!" said Tom, with a smile, "I am afraid some one has been hurt! Let us see."

He opened the door again as he spoke.

But the hall was clear—no trace of anyone could be seen.

"I rather think that will do," he added, closing the door. "I really thought some one was there!"

The baronet looked greatly astonished, but on all occasions he was so accustomed to yield to others that he never even in this instance thought of asserting his authority.

But he knew perfectly well that her ladyship must have received a very sharp blow from the panel of the door, and he trembled for the consequences.

"Young man," he said, in trembling tones, as Tom approached him, "do you know what you have done?"

"Yes," said Tom, quietly, "some one has had rather



[THE ASSASSINATION IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRE CROSS.]

a sharp crack on the head, which will not be forgotten very easily."

"Yea," said the old man, sinking his voice still lower, "but that some one is my wife. Oh," he added, glancing wildly around him, "she is a dreadful woman—oh, a dreadful woman, and so you will find out!"

"I thought so," said Tom; "but I don't care that for her!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he pronounced the words.

"And," he continued, "if I might make so bold as to give you my advice—"

"Well, young man, speak out—I like you."

"Why, you will set a bold front on as I do, and say the same thing."

The baronet half started up, as though some glimmering thought had crossed his mind that he should be able,

by making one sudden effort, to place himself in his true position as head of the mansion.

But the feeling lasted only for a second.

He sank back again into the chair in a condition of hopeless senility.

"And now," said Tom, "we have wandered all this while from my original purpose. Listen, sir, and I will tell you something that I witnessed a short time ago."

Tom King then very circumstantially and minutely made the baronet acquainted with those circumstances with which the reader is already familiar.

He was listened to in the utmost surprise—almost in disbelief.

"Well, sir," concluded Tom, "you may say, and truly, that it was no concern of mine; yet I thought it my duty to make you acquainted with the facts, and have done so simply because of my firm conviction that something was

going on which should not. Now, sir, here is a letter which will give some confirmation of my story. That rascally servant of yours dropped it in the road unconsciously, and I picked it up. It may be of importance or it may not."

The old man's hand shook to such an extent that he could scarcely take the letter from Tom King.

When he did so, he looked attentively at the seal.

"Why—why," he said "it has not been opened!"

Tom was amazed at such a remark.

"Opened? No, I should not be capable of such a deed."

"I—I mean," added the baronet, hastily, and in some confusion, "my wife has not seen this letter!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom; then he added: "And if you will be guided by me you will never let her see it. Open it now and read it while you have the opportunity."

It was really wonderful to see what an ascendancy Tom had already obtained over this old man. It was the power of a strong will over a weak one.

But the highwayman did not know and could not guess what means had been taken and what time expended to reduce this old man to his present pitiable plight.

It was not without a great deal of timidity that he ventured to tear open the letter.

Then adjusting his spectacles, he began to read.

Whilst he was so employed, Tom sat looking intently at him.

His countenance began to be a perfect study.

It lighted up all at once with an expression that was new to Tom.

The dim eyes began to brighten, a smile seemed on the point of breaking forth, and altogether quite a look of happiness overspread his visage.

No sooner had he finished reading the letter, however, than a sudden recollection seemed to come across him.

His head drooped, and once again he became the poor imbecile creature who elicited so much of Tom's commiseration.

"My boy," he murmured, when tears trickled slowly down his withered cheeks—"my poor boy, Roderic, would indeed that you were here! And yet, no—not! What am I saying? I forget myself! Young man," he added, looking up, "I am much obliged for this service you have done me. Is there any recompense that I can make you for it?"

"None whatever," replied Tom, "except—"

"Except what?"

"Why, sir, you see I have met with an accident. My horse fell, and I have broken my arm. It causes me great pain and inconvenience; I am weak from escape of blood, so that if you would afford me the shelter of your roof for a few hours I should ever remain under the deepest obligation to you."

CHAPTER CML.

IN WHICH TOM KING BEGINS TO COMPREHEND THE TRUE CONDITION OF AFFAIRS AT WILFIRS CROSS.

"I am sorry," stammered the baronet—"very sorry; but you have asked me almost the only favour which I cannot grant. My wife, I am sure, will never allow you to remain beneath this roof."

"Then," said Tom, "I take my leave; but at the same time you must allow me to express my regret that a gentleman like yourself should permit a woman thus to rule you, and to make your whole life unhappy. Let me entreat you for the sake of your own happiness to cast off these trammels and once more appear in your own proper character, which, if I read aright, is one incapable of doing any mean or sordid action unless at the powerful suggestions of another."

"You speak truly, young man," was the reply, given with a little extra firmness of tone—"you speak very truly. I should have proffered resistance long ago; now I fear it is too late."

"Believe me," exclaimed Tom, impressively, "it is never too late to do right."

"If I could only think so," continued the baronet, "I could only feel that I had the slightest chance of success."

"Try," said Tom—"try."

For some moments there was a profound still-

ing which it would appear that the baronet was thinking deeply.

After a time, however, he raised his head and looked Tom King full in the face.

"Who you are," he said, "I know not, nor do I care, but you have done me a disinterested kindness, and something, I know not what, draws you towards me—I feel impelled to ask your advice in another matter—to request you to give me your assistance."

"You do me too much honour," said Tom, with a bow.

"You have but to speak, and I will do all I can. Believe me, I shall feel more content if, when I quit this place, I know that I have left you happier."

"Well, well—listen. I have not much to say, but every word is of importance. You must believe, then, that I have not always been the weak, miserable object you now see. No, I was once robust, strong, and possessed of a powerful will. In a word, I was happy."

"My first sorrow was when my wife died, leaving two children to my care. You saw one—Ellen—the other, my eldest, is Roderic."

"Then," exclaimed Tom, "I presume that the lady I have seen is your second wife."

"Yes, yes—she is, and I have ever since regretted the day on which I made her mistress of the hall. My boy, Roderic, was with me then, but very soon his impatient spirit chafed under the restraint that was continually laid upon him."

"I heard all kinds of complaints concerning him, and, like a weak fool, listened to them and reproved him."

"The end of this you already guess. He left me years and years ago. He ran away, and from that time to this I have not heard from or seen him."

"Indirectly I have been told of his doings, and they have always been such as to make my whole blood boil with sorrow and indignation."

"Now, however, I for the first time learn something different. Read this—you have a right to do so—and it will save me much explanation. It is from my oldest boyhood's friend."

With very great surprise, Tom took the letter that was extended towards him, and with still greater astonishment read as follows:—

"MY OLD, OLD FRIEND,—

"Years—many years have passed away since we met or communicated in any way with each other. You remember our parting, do you not? It was an angry one. I blamed you for the part you were taking against your son, under the instigation of the woman you raised to your high position. You resented what I said, we quarrelled and parted, and I smarted to such a degree under the injustice that I made a firm determination never to be the first to extend the hand of friendship to you again."

"Circumstances have made me alter this decision."

"A few days ago, in a manner I will not stop now to relate, I met your only son Roderic. He has grown a fine, broad-shouldered man, now greatly resembling you when you were young. But he has suffered more—far more than I can tell. He went forth to fight the battle of life, and he has come off second best in the encounter."

"His heart, I soon found, yearned towards you, towards his early home, and towards his sister, and so, with much difficulty, I have persuaded him to write to you to the effect that he is very, very sorry for the past, that he asks your pardon for all that he has done to offend you, and wishes to see you once again."

"He will follow hard upon his letter—do not feel surprised if you see him within twelve hours after you receive it."

"And now, my old friend, before I close this letter let me ask you to remember all the past, to welcome your son back, and to place him where he should be, at the head of your household."

"From your faithful friend,

"RICHARD."

Tom read this letter hastily, and then looked inquiringly at the baronet.

"You have read that letter?" he said, interrogatively.

"I have."

"And what do you make of it?"

"It opens up to me a long and painful story," replied Tom. "I can see the noble, high-spirited son thrust on one side for a worthless second wife. I can see her

hatred of the heir, and I can guess the means by which she contrived to poison your mind against him, and to make home so uncomfortable that he was forced to leave it, and to leave it under your displeasure."

"You are right," said the old man, in a broken voice—"quite right. Heaven help me—I have done very wrong! I do believe," he added, "that at one time I hated him. Poor Roderic!"

"And," continued Tom, "I imagine that there is a tie or link of some sort between her ladyship and the man I saw this morning carrying the letter-bag. Can you tell me why he should utter those vindictive words when he singled out that one particular letter? Can you tell me why he intercepted it?"

"I dare not think of it," was the response. "My poor boy's letter has never reached me, and but for you I should have remained in ignorance of it, for my wife would have carefully kept this one from my sight."

"I am rejoiced," said Tom, with great earnestness, "to find that you are so rapidly assuming your own character. You are throwing off all that abjectness which pained me so to witness."

He was responded to by a feeble smile.

"I have great cause for self-reproach," he said—"great cause. Not only did I drive my boy forth a beggar, but have disowned him, cast him off, disinherited him!"

"But if you feel that you are wrong," said Tom, "surely it is not too late to make the needful change. Have you committed your intentions to paper?"

"I have—I have. Do not blame me," he added, hastily, as he observed Tom's reproachful look. "You cannot guess how much I have suffered or how my poor weak nerves have been played upon."

"But again I say it is not too late, provided that you are willing to welcome back your son."

"Willing?" ejaculated the old man. "I would give all I am possessed of if I could but see him stand before me at this moment; but I fear—I sadly fear—there is a dreadful presentiment in my mind that I shall never see him again, and that such will be my punishment for having acted as I have."

"Do not give way to such fears as those," said Tom, kindly; "but, if you really feel inclined to do your son justice, destroy the paper of which you spoke. Then all is well, for, of course, no one could gainsay his right to everything as the eldest born."

"Would that I could!" said the baronet, wringing his hands, and with fresh tears coursing down his cheeks—"would that I could! It is impossible—quite impossible—quite—quite!"

"How?" said Tom—"tell me in what way?"

"My wife has it!"

"Your will?"

"Yes."

Tom paused in deep thought.

"How will all this end?" murmured the old man. "I tremble and grow weak again! I feel—I feel that she is coming!"

"Then," said Tom, "if that is the case, put on what show of boldness you can. Announce your intentions, and abide by them. You will find all you have to do is to maintain the appearance of resolution. It will be difficult at first, but try."

At this instant the door was thrown violently open, and her ladyship appeared upon the threshold.

"Well," she said, in her sharp, commanding tones—"well, may I ask if you intend to remain here all day with this fellow? Ah! I see by your nod that your conference is over."

Then, turning to Tom King, she said, imperiously:

"Go, sir—go—quit the hall at once! You see Sir Ralph desires it."

Tom King looked appealingly at the baronet.

He was sorry—truly sorry—to perceive what an effect the mere presence of this woman had upon him.

He had shrunk up in his chair into the smallest possible compass—he had held up his hands as though he would protect himself from the attack of some assailant, while he trembled from head to foot.

He had given no sign indicating that he wished for Tom's departure, but his wife chose to consider that he had, and trusted to his weakness and imbecility not to dispute her words.

She had resolved to make a bold effort to recover her former position.

Tom waited in vain for the baronet to contradict the words his wife had uttered.

But he was resolved that this infamous woman should not perfect her shameful plans, and so, with a bow of mock respect, he answered:

"I am very sorry indeed to intrude upon your ladyship, but, at the same time, I must beg most emphatically to assure you that just before you entered the room Sir Ralph was pleased to request me to stay here for some time, and I have accepted his invitation."

"Yes, yes," stammered the old man, brightening a little, for he seemed to feel that while Tom was by he had a protector who was able and willing to aid him.

"What," shrieked her ladyship—"what do I hear? Would you speak thus to my face? Sir," she continued, turning to Tom, "you are a scoundrel—an infamous scoundrel! You see the condition of my lamented husband's mind, and you have taken advantage of my absence to play upon it for your unworthy ends! Begone, sir, or I will summon assistance, and have you forcibly expelled!"

"I regret," said Tom, "that I should be the cause of any discord, but I beg to assure you that I shall remain here until Sir Ralph tells me to leave, and let me caution you against attempting to use any force!"

Her ladyship shook again with rage, and, advancing to her husband, she took hold of him by the shoulder, and shook him roughly.

"Ralph—Ralph," she shrieked, "do you hear what that fellow says, or are you insensible to his words? Command him to leave—order him to quit this roof at once!"

"Sir Ralph," said Tom, solemnly, "now is the time—now is the opportunity to do justice to yourself and to those you love! Assert your authority in this case, and you will be the better able to assert it in another. Do not fear any consequence. I will stand by and shield you from all harm. Is it your wish that I should remain here or not?"

"That you should remain," said the old man, with a sudden effort, and speaking in a tone of voice so unlike his own that it made her ladyship fairly stagger back several paces—"that you remain! And you, madam," he added, "quit this room, and do not enter it until I give you permission! Mark me—I will be obeyed!"

Thunderstruck, stupefied, amazed beyond measure, her ladyship, unable to articulate a word, suffered herself to be half bowed, half pushed out of the apartment.

Then Tom closed the door, and locked it.

Tom was only just in time.

When he turned round, the sudden accession of courage which had enabled the baronet to speak as he had done departed, and he again sank helpless and inert into his chair.

Tom perceived it with regret; but banishing that expression from his countenance, he spoke as cheerfully and kindly as he could:

"Do you see the result of a little firmness?" he exclaimed. "Take my advice, and in a short time all will be well."

"I—I am amazed."

"No doubt you are—it is only natural that you should be. Let me tell you, however, that you have only to continue to present the same resolute front, and your object is gained—your wife will sink down into her true position, and justice will be done."

"It shall be done!" murmured the old man. "Do not leave me—do not leave me—remain at my side! While you do so I can be bold and resolute."

"I will with joy," said Tom, "if you will give me word that when Roderic comes he will have your welcome and your blessing."

"He will—he will!" was the reply. "Would that I could see him now!"

"Most fervently do I re-echo that wish! And now, sir, as you were kind enough to grant me the favour of allowing me to remain here for a short time, I think I shall be able to requite you it."

"You have done so already."

"No—no. You forget the will. By some means or other that must be obtained and destroyed, otherwise it will be the source of endless unhappiness."

"But how is it to be obtained?" said the baronet, again in the deepest dejection—"how can it be done?"

"Leave it to me," said Tom. "If I have your permission to remain beneath this roof I will do my best to recover possession of it, and as I have set my mind upon this matter, it will be strange indeed if I do not succeed."

The old man gazed upon him in unqualified surprise.

Such vigour and resolution were strange to him.

But he looked childishly pleased and happy as he said:

"Do that, young sir—do that, and you will ever be entitled to my gratitude!"

CHAPTER CXXII.

EVENTS AT WILFIRS CROSS BEGIN TO ASSUME A DEEPLY-INTERESTING ASPECT.

THE deep interest which Tom King could not help feeling in these strange events with which he had been so singularly identified and mixed up, caused him to forget all about the wound in his arm, and probably he would have continued to do so had he not been most disagreeably reminded of it by feeling a sharp twinge of pain, which he could not prevent showing itself on his countenance.

The baronet looked at him in surprise.

"My good sir," he exclaimed, "what is it ails you?—what is the meaning of that strange expression?"

"You will pardon me," said Tom, "but the fact is, I met with an accident while riding a short time ago—nothing very serious I believe; but just then I felt a sudden return of pain; even now it has not subsided."

"You must have a rare amount of fortitude," was the reply, "to behave as you have, and all the time suffering from a recent injury. But what can I do to assist you?"

"I am afraid nothing," said Tom, "for, of course, you have no surgical assistance in the house?"

"I am sorry to say none."

"Well, then, I will just bear with the pain a little time longer while we talk over our position. You must pardon me for this extra trouble, but I have lost some blood, and it seems to have had a confusing effect upon my mental faculties, so that I am not quite sure I fully understand the proper aspect of affairs."

"Of what is it, then, that you are in doubt?"

"I cannot say that I am in doubt about anything—at all events, we may come to several conclusions. The first is, that the letter taken from the bag by your servant was the one written to you by your son Roderic."

"Yes, no doubt of it—no doubt of it. And yet, after all, Roderic's letter may be upon the table, for, you see, her ladyship, in hastily quitting the room, has forgotten that she has left all the letters on the table."

"But that point can soon be ascertained, can it not?"

"Oh, yes! My old eyes are dim, but yet they seem brighter than they did a short time ago. I feel sure that I could recognise my poor boy's writing at the first glance."

He rose, apparently by a painful effort, from his chair, and stooping over the table, sorted the letters over quickly.

He gave one glance to each, then shook his head.

"No, Roderic's letter is not there," he said. "There can be no doubt that is the one you saw intercepted."

"I am perfectly certain. But you have not told me what situation this man holds in your household."

"That would be hard to say," was the strange answer.

"He was engaged some years ago by my wife, and since then has occupied himself I scarcely know how, chiefly as an assistant to my steward."

Tom nodded.

"I was certain some tie existed," he exclaimed—"I felt a conviction of it, and it is easy now for me to comprehend why he broke forth into such vindictive expressions when he caught sight of your son's letter."

The baronet looked at Tom in some surprise.

"I am not certain," continued Tom, "whether you fully realise your exact position; but I am perfectly assured that a plot is now on foot, and has been for some time, to wrest from you all your possessions. One great step has been gained by the disinheritance of your son, another in the will you have been persuaded to make.

Justly, then, they must fear any return of your son as likely to undo all that they have accomplished."

"I understand you."

"I am glad you do. And now I can assure you that the pain in my arm so much increases that I shall not be able to endure it much longer. Can you tell me where I shall be likely to meet with surgical aid?"

"In the next village," was the answer; "it is not more than a mile and a half away, and one apothecary lives there who has quite a reputation for his skill in broken limbs and such matters."

"Then, with your leave," said Tom, "I will ride over to him."

"Do so—do so."

"And that," continued Tom, reflectively, "suggests to me another plan—an amendment in my course of operations. I will leave here as though I intended to depart for good, especially we will try to make your wife and her accomplice believe that I am going and shall not return again."

"But why?" inquired the old man—"why?"

"Simply because while I am here they will watch my movements very closely, and be circumspect in all they do; when I am gone it will be different."

"I see."

"You may depend upon it," continued Tom, "that I shall return here as quickly as possible; but I shall do it secretly—no one shall be aware of my presence if I can help it; but I will keep the closest watch upon everything, and if I see cause to interfere will do so."

"But you are putting yourself to much trouble on my account."

"No, no," said Tom—"believe me, none at all. You can more than repay me for anything I do by finding me a shelter for the space of a few days, until, in fact, my arm is well."

"It is a simple request, but I grant it readily."

"Thanks! And now let me ask you to try your best to remain as you now are—that is, something like yourself. The change which has taken place during the last half hour is surprising; let me hope that it will continue."

"I will try to be firm—I will try to assert my own independence."

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it?"

"I fancy I can hear some one approaching. Wait, and I will unfasten the door."

With a noiseless step, Tom crossed the room, and as noiselessly turned the key; then, sinking his voice to the lowest whisper, he said:

"I am now going to take a farewell of you—I mean a farewell in appearance. You do what you can to persuade me to stay, and I will declare how impossible it is. Act your part well, and your wife will be quite deceived."

The old baronet nodded, and scarcely had this understanding been arrived at than the door was flung rudely open, and her ladyship, looking very flushed, made her appearance.

Tom was standing with his back to the door, and took not the least notice of her entrance.

The first words that reached her ears were:

"No, sir, believe me, it causes very great regret on my part to refuse your kind offer, but the business I have is so pressing and immediate that I cannot remain with you. At some other time I shall be proud and glad to avail myself of your hospitality."

A slight change came over the baronet when he was conscious of the presence of his wife; but he studiously strove to prevent his eyes from meeting hers.

With a deep sigh, which told how much sincerity there was in the words, he replied:

"I wish I could persuade you to remain, but since I cannot, let me know when you will be this way again—when I shall have the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Not for a month at least," said Tom. "And now, as I have lingered too long already, perhaps you will permit me to take my departure. I am glad you do not think ill of me, though my errand was an unwelcome one. Until I heard your view of the case I believed your son Roderic to be deeply injured, and that's why I ventured to become his intercessor. What you have told me has, however, changed my opinion."

These words for a moment or two mystified the old man greatly; but her ladyship, for whose ear they were especially intended, looked intensely surprised.

"It is hard," added Tom, "for a father and a son to be parted, and so I hope the time will come when you will be reunited. Now, sir, farewell!"

He made his bow, and turned round.

Her ladyship looked at him scornfully.

"Farewell, my lady!" said Tom, with another bow. "I am sorry I behaved with so much rudeness to you; but, then, it seems I have been altogether led astray."

The baronet's wife could scarcely understand all this; it was so entirely different to what she had expected.

She had made up her mind to rave and storm, and by main force to have Tom King driven forth.

Now she found him in the act of leaving.

As he quitted the room, however, Tom King gave one parting glance at her countenance, and surely if any face ever spoke, hers did then.

The thought that occupied her mind was plainly to be read.

It was:

"Go—go! I am glad to be rid of you! And when you are once outside these walls I will take care that you do not re-enter them!"

Quitting the room, Tom King found himself in the spacious hall, which reached from the front to the back of the mansion.

In the centre was a broad flight of stone steps, leading to the upper story.

Tom turned at once in the direction of the door that opened in the rear of the mansion, as his object was to go as quickly as he could to the stables, obtain his horse, and ride off.

The pain he felt was something terrific, yet he bore it like a martyr.

He was rather surprised to find no servants about, and not desiring to create any stir, for he felt that the fewer persons by whom he was seen the better, Tom strode quickly along the passage.

On his way, he passed one door that was a little way open, and as he did so, some sweet, girlish tones reached his ears.

"Not now, Ernest," said the voice—"not now! I dare not remain here. To-night, at the old spot near the plantation, I will meet you."

Tom did not wait to hear the response, but hurried on.

He attached no particular importance to what he had overheard. It was not until afterwards, indeed, that the circumstance was brought back to his memory.

Crossing a lawn which extended itself at the rear of the hall, Tom bent his steps towards the outbuildings.

Reaching them, he was still surprised to notice the absence of any servants.

The first door he came to evidently led into the stables.

It was standing partly open, and Tom paused upon the threshold.

Looking in, he saw seated on a corn-bin, with his back towards him, the man whom he had witnessed opening the letter-bag.

He was so intent upon something he was doing that evidently he had not heard Tom King's approach.

Everything this man might do had a special interest in Tom's eyes, and therefore the highwayman waited and watched his movements with great attention.

Not at first, however, was he able to make out what the object was that the man held.

It looked almost like a slender steel rod, and this he appeared to be polishing vigorously.

Suddenly, however, the other end was raised, and when Tom King caught a glimpse of it he perceived at once that it was some singular kind of firearm, the like of which he had never before seen.

It was just at this time that the man, turning round for the purpose of obtaining some more oil, caught sight of Tom standing in the doorway.

He uttered a cry of surprise, and he exhibited great signs of consternation.

He recovered his presence of mind sufficiently, however, to raise the lid of the corn-bin, drop the singular weapon into it, and then turn the key in the padlock.

Then, with great servility, he to cap, and spoke to Tom in fawning tones.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he said. not see you! May I ask what you want?"

"Merely my horse," said Tom, who, wishing to throw this man as much off his guard as possible, thought the best thing he could do was to pretend to be unaware of what the man was about.

"Very good, sir," was the answer. "I will call the groom. Yours is the grey horse, I believe?"

"Yes, that is right. But as the groom is not here, do not trouble yourself to call him. If you will assist me, I will soon have the saddle and bridle on. I stayed with your master rather longer than I intended, and I am now anxious to make up for the time I have lost."

Tom did not wait for the man to consent or refuse, but going at once to the grey horse, he began to saddle him.

The under-steward, if such he may be termed, assisted him, and while he was doing so he was cunning enough to ask, in a pretended, offhand way, as though it did not concern him in the least:

"Shall you be back again soon, sir?"

"No," replied Tom. "I should if I could, but business calls me. I trust to call again in about a month, or it may be more."

"A month?" said the under-steward, with a cough, and stroking his chin with his hand—"a month? That's a long time! Many changes take place in a month sometimes!"

"Yes," said Tom, who could not help thinking there was a deeper meaning in what the man said than appeared at first sight.

By this time the horse was saddled and brought out into the yard.

Tom drew his hat closely over his face, buttoned up his coat, which he had a good excuse for doing, for the air was very cold, then vaulted into the saddle.

"If I follow that lane," said Tom, pointing over a stone wall, "it will take me to Wilfrs Cross, will it not?"

"To the village, sir? Oh, yes! Wait a moment! I will open the gate for you. Then turn to the left, and you will find it rather more than a mile and a half away."

"Yes, yes," said Tom, "I know perfectly well. Accept that as a recompense for your civility."

He dropped a crown-piece into the man's hand as he spoke, then turning his head in the requisite direction, rode rapidly away.

"Confound the rascal!" muttered Tom, between his teeth. "It went sorely against the grain of me to give him anything, and yet it is important he should be thrown off his guard, and I believe I have well succeeded."

"Events will grow interesting ere long, I feel certain."

What an evil-looking scamp he is, to be sure!" he added, a moment afterwards. "'Villain' is stamped upon his face. And what could he want with that strange firearm, I wonder, for firearm I am sure it is? No good! Anyone could tell that by the confusion of his manner, and by his great anxiety to conceal it. Well, well—we shall see! Perhaps by nightfall we shall witness a perfect revolution in this household!"

CHAPTER CXLII.

TOM KING HAS A RARE ADVENTURE WITH A FLOUS APOTHECARY.

WHILE indulging in these reflections, Tom King trotted his horse rapidly in the direction he wished to take—partly in order that not even the faintest breath of suspicion should cloud the under-steward's mind, and partly because he was exceedingly anxious to have his arm looked to, for the anguish it occasioned him was almost more than he could bear.

Under any other circumstances than the present it is possible that Tom might have hesitated a little before he made up his mind to visit the village.

But the peculiar nature of the events by which he was surrounded, and the pain of his wound, made him forgetful of all ordinary caution.

Certainly, as he journeyed on he saw nothing to create the least amount of uneasiness in his mind.

Around him all that he could see was a wide

expanse of well-cultivated land, forming part of the domain of Sir Ralph Cromer.

The village, as he suspected, he found scarcely worthy of the name, and was inhabited only by those people employed directly or indirectly by the baronet.

There was an ale-house, with a large swinging sign; and just beyond that, lying rather back from the road, was a small house, on the front of which was painted: "Elisha Coles, apothecary."

The appearance of Tom King in this remote and little-frequented place caused an immense amount of excitement—an excitement that would have been greater still had he arrived at any other portion of the day.

But just then it happened that the majority of the inhabitants were absent pursuing their daily occupations.

Tom was just beginning to think that surely this quiet little retreat was one in which nothing of him or his comrades could be known—some place where the police officers would never penetrate—when he discovered that it was quite a delusion.

He absolutely started indeed when he saw posted upon a wall a bill similar in appearance to many he had seen before.

It was some distance off, but he did not desire to approach it any closer.

He could tell very well that the figures at the top represented the amount of the reward offered for the apprehension of himself and his companions, and that below was a full description of the personal appearance of each.

After seeing this, Tom might naturally hesitate before he ventured to trust himself in the apothecary's abode.

But pair quickly banished that hesitation, and he looked around him with a somewhat pleasant smile, feeling that he could if necessary, vanquish the whole village.

Perceiving that a stranger had stopped before his gate, a small, thin man, with scanty grey hair, opened the front door of the house, and advanced with a stooping gait.

"Good morning, sir!" he said, in a voice between a whine and a drawl. "Heaven be praised, I can say it—good morning, sir! May I ask what you want with me!"

Tom King thought this a very singular address, and stared at the speaker with surprise.

His amazement lasted only for a moment, and then he inquired:

"Am I addressing Mr. Coles?"

"Yes—praise the Lord, for all His mercies—such is my name."

"Then," said Tom, "I have been sent down from the hall, by Sir Ralph; he tells me that you are clever in surgery, and you see I have met with a slight accident to my arm."

"Oh, Sir Ralph is too good—much too good, and yet not good either, if I may contradict myself—he is an evil-minded man, quite dead to all true piety and religion. May I hope, sir, that you are a believer—that you have been saved?"

"Oh, decidedly!" said Tom.

"If not," continued the pious apothecary, "either allow me to convert you, or else depart—I will give no assistance to the ungodly."

"I need no conversion," said Tom—"none at all, I can assure you."

"I rejoice to hear it," was the reply—"greatly rejoice! Please to enter, my good sir, and while I am at tending to your hurt we can have a little edifying conversation upon grace."

Luckily, just then, Tom turned round, for he could not suppress a smile at the idea of one of his profession having any such conversation.

Somehow or other he had taken an invincible dislike to Mr. Coles, in spite of all his professions of piety.

Tom's own opinion was that, like many others he assumed religion only as a cloak.

Whether this was so or not really did not much signify to the highwayman, provided he was really expert in dressing wounds.

"I am a poor, weak, trembling worm," he said, as he ushered Tom King into a small parlour at the back of his little shop—"a poor, trembling worm, weak in body, but I trust strong in grace."

Tom gave a sympathetic sigh and snook his head, which he thought were the best things he could do by way of reply.

"Sit down, my dear sir—take this chair, and allow me to examine the nature of the injury."

Tom gladly complied, for just then he really felt quite ill and faint, and instead of one apothecary he saw fifty at least spinning round before him.

"Why, gracious powers, is it possible?" ejaculated Mr. Coles. "Why, this is a wound you have received from some kind of firearm!"

"Yes—yes, you are quite right."

A look of surprise and curiosity appeared on the apothecary's face as he said:

"How strange for you to speak of it as an accident; I never saw anything look less accidental in my life."

"No matter," said Tom, very faintly—"see to it, I beg I feel now as though all the life had ebbed out of my veins."

One glance into Tom's countenance was ample confirmation of the truth of what he had just said.

His eyes were half closed and his face deathly pale.

Mr. Coles now bestirred himself in good earnest, and, by the way in which he went about his work, justified the opinion Sir Ralph had expressed concerning him.

Tom grew fainter and fainter—he became insensible of all pain.

He knew that the apothecary was busy with his arm, and had some dim idea that a bullet had been extracted, for he fancied that a voice miles and miles off had whispered something to that effect in his ear.

When he recovered himself, he found his arm carefully bound up, and Mr. Coles standing over him, gazing very attentively into his countenance.

Tom opened his eyes suddenly—so suddenly, indeed, that the apothecary gave a start and uttered an ejaculation that did not sound particularly pious.

At the same time, Tom saw him cram something rather hastily into one of his pockets, but what it was he could not make out.

"Ahem!" he said, in some confusion. "You feel better now, sir, I hope?"

"Yes, decidedly better," said Tom, in a very faint voice, and pretending to be much weaker than he really was, for he thought by this means he should be able to understand the meaning of the apothecary's confusion.

He had his eyes all the time fixed upon the coat-pocket into which that something had been thrust so hurriedly.

"Have you nothing to revive me—something in the shape of a stimulant?"

Mr. Coles had been watching Tom with half-closed eyes, in an attitude and manner strongly resembling the way in which a cat will regard the movements of a mouse.

"Yes," he said, "I have something that will do you good, and after that we will return thanks for your narrow escape and complete restoration."

The apothecary turned round and opened a drawer.

While he was so engaged his back was turned towards Tom, who leaning quickly forward, dipped his fingers into the gaping coat pocket and drew forth a crumpled up piece of paper.

Before he had time to look at it the apothecary turned round and said:

"Here, my dear sir, is the stimulant I spoke of."

Then, in a tone of voice strikingly at variance to that which he had all along employed, he exclaimed:

"Tom King, I know you, and I claim the reward! Do you feel that pressing against your forehead? Do you know what it is? It is the muzzle of a pistol—a pistol carefully loaded, and if you stir or offer the least resistance I will blow your brains out and say I did it in self-defence!"

It cost Tom a great effort, but nevertheless he sat perfectly still, except that he partially unfolded the crumpled-up paper, and saw that it was one of the bills containing a description of himself.

"You are weak," said the apothecary, excitedly—"you have not the strength of a mouse; and remember, this pistol is at your head. Show your good sense, then, by immediate surrender."

Tom closed his eyes, and seemed as though he had quite swooned away for the second time.

The action threw the apothecary partially off his

guard, and Tom took the utmost advantage of this circumstance.

With a sudden movement, he wrested the pistol from the apothecary's hand, while at the same time he seized him by the throat with a powerful grasp.

The pain he endured was something fearful, but he did not care for it now.

"You rascal!" said Tom, "this is your piety, is it? Keep still! Don't move or speak, or I will be the worse for you!"

The apothecary's limbs trembled to such an extent that he could not stand.

Tom did not possess the strength requisite to hold him up, so he slipped down and sat on the floor in a very ignominious manner indeed.

"Go!" he said to Tom. "Go away, and leave me here—I will not try to molest you any further!"

"I cannot believe you," said Tom, "or place the least trust in your words. I am going to take such measures as make my safety certain."

Tom glanced around him, in search of something by which he could secure his prisoner.

He saw nothing, however, save some cloths, or rather towels, some of which had been used in the dressing of his arm.

Taking up one, he twisted it rapidly into the shape of a rope; then, when Mr. Coles opened his mouth to speak again, he thrust it between his teeth, and with nimble fingers tied it tightly at the back of his head, so that he was most effectually gagged.

A dismal, moaning sound, inaudible at any distance, was all the noise that he could make.

Two more towels served excellently well to confine his arms and ankles.

Then came the consideration, where should he be disposed of until such time as Tom could get safely away?

This was rather a puzzling question, for some of the people belonging to his household might enter the room the moment he left it, and raise an alarm.

This above all things Tom was anxious to prevent and at last he believed he had hit upon the means of doing so.

By the side of the fireplace he perceived the door of a large cupboard.

The key was sticking in the lock, so Tom unhesitatingly turned it and pulled open the door.

An ejaculation of astonishment—almost of terror—escaped his lips, for he suddenly found himself face to face with a most unexpected object.

This was the skeleton of a man, so placed as to appear to be standing upright in the closet.

The white, polished bones, and the glittering pieces of wire by which they were fixed together, had an awfully ghastly look.

Tom turned round and looked at the apothecary, and he could tell by the expression of his face that he rather enjoyed Tom's discomfiture.

But the highwayman did not allow it to be manifest, for, pointing to the skeleton and addressing Mr. Coles, he exclaimed:

"A friend of yours, I suppose? Well, I think there is room for both. You shall go in there and keep him company."

The apothecary shook his head violently.

"No, you sha'n't," said Tom. "I have an idea—a very good idea."

What it was will quickly be seen.

The apothecary, with glaring eyes, watched every one of Tom's movements, all the while feeling a most uncomfortable sensation in his breast.

First of all, Tom found that the skeleton was suspended in the cupboard by means of a piece of wire hooked over a nail.

To take the framework of bones down was therefore an easy matter.

Having done so, he dragged it with him a short distance, and placed it in the old-fashioned arm-chair in which the apothecary usually sat.

A cloak was hanging up behind the door, and in this, with a little trouble, Tom carefully enveloped the skeleton.

Then pulling off the apothecary's wig and spectacles, he placed them on the skeleton's head, surmounting the

whole by a three-cornered hat that he had found hanging up along with the cloak.

The appearance produced by this object was horrifying in the extreme, and would surely be sufficient almost to terrify to death anyone who came upon it at unawares.

The white, polished, long face had truly a horrible appearance, which was heightened by the incongruous objects placed about it. Most especially did the huge horn spectacles add to this appearance.

Tom had a little trouble in forcing the skeleton to sit sufficiently upright, but even this difficulty was overcome, and then he carefully arranged the folds of the cloak in such a manner that one of the white, ghastly skeleton bones was plainly shown upon the black cloth, which made its whiteness appear all the more striking.

This done, Tom stepped back a pace or two, and regarded his work with an eye of admiration.

Not so the apothecary.

He gazed on all with the greatest wonder and apprehension.

"Now," said Tom, addressing him, "I have a great mind to hang you up in the cupboard in the same way that you hung up the skeleton. I will not do so, however, but I will place you there, and take good care you do not get out."

It required all Tom's present strength to drag the body of the apothecary across the floor of the little parlour and prop him up in the closet.

But, as has been stated, he was a thin, diminutive man, and his weight was a mere trifle.

Having got him upon his feet, Tom pushed him close against the wall at the back of the cupboard.

The apothecary was inclined to resist—he did not like the idea of being locked up in that confined space.

And so, being perfectly helpless, he fell forward much in the same manner as a corpse might have done.

But Tom pushed him back with some vigour, and the next moment the door of the closet was closed.

Then came a dull, heavy thump.

The apothecary had tumbled up against it.

The highwayman turned the key, took it out of the lock, and consigned it to his pocket.

Then, tapping on the woodwork, he said:

"Good morning, Mr. Coles! I hope you will make yourself as comfortable as circumstances will admit! I rather think you will remain there for some time. Whoever comes into the room next will be rather startled."

Just then Tom heard a footstep approaching, so he considered it was high time to be off.

He gave one parting glance at the skeleton, whose aspect appeared to be even more horrible than at first, and then opened the door.

On the threshold he met some one that he took to be a maid-of-all-work.

She started on seeing Tom, and then said:

"Oh, if you please, sir, is Mr. Coles in his room?"

"Yes," said Tom, "and I don't think he wishes to be disturbed."

"Oh, never mind his wishes!" was the reply. "Missis wants him, so he must come!"

With these words the girl brushed past Tom King, pushed open the door of the room abruptly, and advanced about half a dozen steps before she noticed the figure seated in the arm-chair.

The cloak—which, oddly enough, the apothecary sometimes wore indoors, because he complained so of the cold—the three-cornered hat, and the wig were quite familiar to the girl's eyes, but she caught a glimpse of the skeleton's face and the bony hand.

She stopped short, and uttered a dismal shriek.

At the same moment a horrible, rumbling, thumping noise assailed her ears, accompanied by a muffled groan.

The girl responded by another shriek, and fell down face foremost on the floor.

Tom heard more footsteps approaching, and so veal a precipitate retreat.

"I should like to know how it all goes on," he murmured, "but can't stay. I rather fancy there will be a slight commotion in the village before many hours pass away. Well, so much the better—they will be all the less likely to think about me."

With this philosophical remark, Tom mounted his horse and rode off.

Just as he did so, he saw a window in the apothecary's

house was dashed open, and a female voice shrieked out:

"Oh, murder—murder! Help—help! Murder!"

Tom King took no further notice, but, trotting round a corner of the lane, was in a moment lost to sight.

CHAPTER CMLXIII.

DESCRIBES HOW A TROOP OF POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVED RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY AT THE VILLAGE.

BEFORE following Tom King and relating the further adventures which befel him at the hall, it is necessary that we should take a brief glance at the proceedings in the village—proceedings that resulted in very serious consequences, for Tom was quite wrong in thinking that he had heard the last of the joke.

The violent outcry, then, was made by the wife of the apothecary, who was almost beside herself with terror.

She had caught one glimpse of her servant girl lying, as it appeared to her, dead upon the parlour floor, and of the skeleton seated in the arm-chair.

In the deep, sleepy silence which invariably prevailed in the village, her outcries were distinctly heard, and soon several neighbours came hurrying forwards to learn what was the matter.

"Murder!" shrieked Mrs. Coles. "Oh, murder—murder! There's a double murder in the house!"

On receipt of this intimation, those who had drawn near the apothecary's house drew back, uttering dismal shrieks.

Soon, however, men were seen running hastily towards them.

Some came from the alehouse, others from the places where they had been engaged in working.

Strangely enough, the first man who passed through the garden gate was the landlord of the alehouse, and he was so short and so stout, so scant of breath, and so chronically red in the face, that it was quite a wonder now he could have contrived to move himself so quickly.

The unusual exertion deprived him of the power of speech, and after his arrival all he could do was to goggle his eyes fearfully, and gasp like some huge fish suddenly thrown upon the shore.

Then came the smith, and after him the cooper, who also filled the office of parish constable, and behind him again came his assistant.

"Come in!" shrieked Mrs. Coles, weeping and wringing her hands. "Oh, do come in—somebody come in and see the awful sight!"

"What's the matter?" asked the blacksmith, hoarsely.

"Matter? murder is the matter!" was the answer.

"Why don't you come in and look? I can see you there, Mr. Peters; why don't you set the example of coming forward?"

This was addressed to the parish constable.

"I am coming, ma'am," he answered—"I am coming; but perhaps you'd be kind enough to run downstairs and open the door, or shall we break it in?"

"No, no—I will come down," was the reply. "Wait a minute, I'll come down."

She disappeared at once from the window, and then the constable, facing round and addressing the men, said:

"I call upon you all, as good men and true, to assist me in this matter! If it is murder, the guilty man may be in the house, and if so, you must assist me to capture him."

Just then the front door was thrown open, and Mrs. Coles made a dash to get outside.

The constable stepped out of the way immediately, and addressing the others, he cried after the manner of some gallant generals:

"Forward—forward! Enter! I will follow!"

But the villagers by no means saw the force of this arrangement; they resolutely refused to stir, while they cried:

"No—no, Mr. Peters, it's your place to go first. Come now, no shirking, we'll back you up!"

Mr. Peters looked as though he should prefer backing out of the whole affair, but he was afraid to say as much.

At length the villagers fairly clustered round him, and drove him to the front door of the house.

In spite of all his straggles and resistance, the shop was

entered and crossed, and the door leading into the little parlour reached.

They stopped a moment on the threshold.

"Th—th—there's nobody here!" said Mr. Peters, speaking as well as his chattering teeth would allow him—"th—th—there's nobody here!"

Just then an awful cry came upon their ears, yet it was not a cry either, nor a groan, nor a moan, nor, in fact, any specific sound for which there is a name.

It was something compounded of all these, yet seeming dull and muffled, and mingled with it was an odd, lumbering, thumping noise.

"Murder!" roared the constable—"murder! Let me out—let me out! I can't stay here!"

But by this time the apothecary's shop was filled with people, and so densely packed were they that it was impossible for those who had already entered to pass out again.

Not one who heard the horrible sounds could control their consternation.

Faces dirty and begrimed by labour turned ghastly white, and, what was the greatest phenomenon of all, the ruby countenance of the alehouse landlord blanched also.

The fearful sound was repeated again and again, or it would be more correct to say it never ceased.

"It—it comes from that room," remarked the constable, presently. "What can it be?"

"Push the door open a little wider," was the reply. "There can be no harm in doing that. Then perhaps we shall see."

Fortunately for the constable, one of the villagers had entered armed with a pitchfork, and this he passed over the heads of the rest as he said:

"Here, Muster Peters, just gi'e the door a poke with that!"

The constable complied with this demand, and slowly and creakingly the door was pushed open upon its hinges.

Then truly was an awful sight presented to their notice.

The servant girl still lay stretched insensible upon the floor, and there sat the skeleton in the apothecary's arm-chair, looking, if possible, more hideous than ever, for the slight wind coming through the open window, which had blown the door to again, had also disarranged the bony framework so that the head was inclined to one side, after the manner of the attitude some people are apt to assume when they wish to appear particularly knowing or cunning.

Such a sight as this was one for which the villagers were not prepared.

They stood as if suddenly turned to stone; literally they were rooted to the spot—not one could have stirred, had his life depended upon it—it, became, indeed, a difficult matter even to breathe.

Then the horrible noise came again, this time somewhat louder than before.

The lumbering was more unmistakable, and, as if by a common instinct, all turned their eyes in the direction of the cupboard behind which the apothecary was standing.

That, beyond all doubt, was the source from which the noise proceeded, but who was there among them bold enough to enter that awful chamber, and opening the cupboard, ascertain the cause of the disturbance?

Who would venture to approach the fearful object sitting in the chair?

Certainly no one of those present.

Then the girl began to show signs of returning consciousness.

She moved slightly and uttered a moaning sound, both of which increased the terror of the villagers, if such a thing could possibly be.

"Oh!" she groaned, "what have I seen? Murder—murder!"

"Take notice of that," said the constable, in a deep and warning voice—"take notice of that! Her first words were—'Murder—murder!'"

Those whom he addressed nodded, and looked as wise as they were able.

Then the girl, raising her head, once more caught sight of the ghastly figure in the chair.

This time, however, she did not faint, but, in some in-



[THE STRANGE MEETING OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE TURNPIKE GATE.]

comprehensible fashion, rolled, crawled, and tumbled over the floor until she reached the threshold; then, gaining her feet, she turned round and endeavoured to fly.

But the constable, with a sudden accession of valour, seized her and held her tightly.

"No," he said, "not so fast! You are my prisoner, and must explain the meaning of all this!"

This completed the girl's terror, and she found herself unable to speak at all.

Meanwhile, the bumping inside the cupboard continued at a prodigious rate.

"Speak, wretched girl!" said the constable, with surprising boldness—"speak, I say, and explain all this!"

Just then there was a louder bump than usual against the cupboard door—so loud a one, and given with such force, that the woodwork could not withstand it.

Suddenly the door flew open, and out rolled the apothecary.

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Then such a fighting and scrambling to get out of the shop when they beheld this strange, singular apparition—for no one recognised the apothecary—was something fearful.

Shrieks and cries of every description rent the air.

The apothecary knew that help was near—it will be remembered that Tom King had not deprived him of his sense of hearing—he knew all that had taken place, and so, most exasperated at the turn of affairs, he wondered how his neighbours could be so stupid.

The roll of cloth in his mouth effectually prevented speech; but in his struggles, he had got one hand partially at liberty, and now, after having rolled over a few times on the floor, he disengaged it entirely.

When this was done, it was by no means so difficult to untie the towel that bound his feet, and also the one that gagged him.

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By the time he had accomplished these operations not a soul was left in the shop, which presented a scene of terrible ruin and disorder.

Heedless of all this, and heedless of his own appearance, and intent only upon vengeance, Mr. Coles rushed forth.

He saw the villagers flying before him like a flock of sheep.

He shouted to them at the top of his voice—he waved his arms, and called to them to come back.

But the more he shouted the faster they ran, and eventually, tired and breathless, he stopped at the extreme end of the village, while his neighbours continued their headlong flight.

The apothecary wiped the blood and perspiration from his face, while he gave utterance to some very impious exclamations.

He was now quite alone in his native village—it was deserted by every human being.

He was engaged in speculating upon the means he should adopt of rejoining his companions, or calling them to his side, when he perceived, approaching from an opposite direction, a small troop of horsemen.

The apothecary cleared his clouded eyes, and gazed upon them.

"Officers!" he cried, with a shriek—"they are officers! Now—now I shall be repaid for all that I have suffered—now, indeed, will the tables be turned!"

Without another word, he scampered off in this fresh direction.

The officers saw the singular figure bounding towards them at such a rapid rate, and viewed it with surprise, for every now and then the excited apothecary would miss his footing and fall heavily to the ground.

Then he would not stay to rise again, but continued rolling over and over in a most inexplicable way, until finally he rolled up on to his feet, and continued at full speed again.

When he at last reached the officers, he found himself unable to articulate a word; wisely, therefore, he forebore from making the attempt; he knew if he waited a moment he would soon recover command of his breath.

Having done so, he exclaimed:

"The reward—the reward! Mark you, I claim the reward! I am fully and fairly entitled to it, so don't try to cheat me out of it!"

"What reward?" asked one of the officers. "Speak out, and tell us what you mean."

"Why, for the apprehension of Tom King!"

"Tom King?" they ejaculated, in surprise. "What, have you seen him? Do you know where he is?"

"I have seen him! Curses on him!" was the reply. "He has left me in this awful plight! Can you not see?"

"We do—we do; but are unable to comprehend it!"

"Then I will explain. But come on, follow me the while; I can tell you while we are walking!"

Accordingly, the apothecary did so; but there is no reason why we should follow his version of the affair, since the facts are well known already.

The officers listened with surprise, and, very much to the little man's indignation, roared heartily at the concluding portion of his narrative.

"But," said the officer in command, "do you mean to say this has just happened?"

"Well, only a short time ago."

"And you tell us that Tom King actually rode away?"

"Well, I have every reason to believe he did. He came on horseback, and it is fair to suppose he would depart in the same way."

"Then it's very odd we have not seen him," continued the officer, "for we have been closely on the look-out for some hours past. We knew well enough that he must be in this part of the country, but could not tell exactly where."

While he was speaking, the officer raised himself in his stirrups and looked keenly around him.

He was not able, however, to catch a single glimpse of the highwayman.

"Which is your house?" was the next question.

The apothecary pointed to it.

"Then we'll pay a visit there," was the reply.

"Perhaps by looking around us we shall be able to obtain some clue as to the direction he has taken."

This was a very reasonable idea indeed, and all felt it to be so, especially the apothecary, who stepped forward with greater briskness than before.

"There's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip, is there not, old fellow?" said the chief officer, with a grin. "You thought you had Tom King all safe and sure; but he turned the tables upon you."

"He did. But he cannot have got far away; remember, it is broad daylight—he must be close at hand."

"I am surprised that he should venture out during the day; but, of course, it would be the pain of his wound that would force him to adopt this course. The rascal is well mounted, and unless we can get a change of horses I fear we shall stand at a poor chance of capturing him, for ours are completely knocked up; we are looking about indeed for some place where we can give them an hour or two's rest."

"Well, then, no fresh horses are to be had in the village," answered the apothecary. "What is to be done?"

"I don't know yet," was the answer; "but if he is badly hurt, as you say, he can't have got far off; we must come up with him ere long."

By the time these explanations had been completed the village was reached, and the officer in command, with a ready thought, dismounted, ordering his companions to do the same, save one, in whose charge the horses were left.

"Now ride down to the inn yonder with them, and let them have some hay and water and a rub down; that will be better than nothing: in the meantime we will look about."

They pushed through the gate in front of the apothecary's house, and as soon as they had done so, the villagers, having recovered a little from their absurd alarm, came creeping slowly back again, their courage reviving in a very great degree as they caught sight of the police officers.

The first visit was to the parlour, where the grim skeleton still sat.

The officers no sooner saw it than they roared with laughter.

"It's a good joke!" said the one in command, wiping the tears from his eyes—"it's a capital joke, and no mistake! Why, old fellow, you will never have such another chance of laying hold of five hundred pounds in your life!"

"But I claim the reward!"

"Claim away," was the response. "Don't you wish you may get it? Now, my lads, we've seen enough here; just let us look round outside."

To the outside accordingly they went.

The apothecary pointed out the place where Tom's horse had been tied.

Marks of his hoofs were distinctly visible, but only just on the spot where he had been standing.

The road was hard elsewhere, and showed no trace whatever.

But the officers considered themselves to be well on the scent.

The apothecary's cottage was a centre from which they could strike out in all directions, and their hypothesis was that Tom King would seek the nearest place of shelter he was able to find, in the hope of being able to lie there concealed until the friendly shades of night should gather around him.

CHAPTER CMLIV.

RELATES THE STRANGE ADVENTURES TOM KING MET WITH IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRS CROSS.

LEAVING the police officers to follow out as best they may the clue they had already found to Tom's whereabouts, we will return to the highwayman himself.

When he trotted away so composedly from the apothecary's cottage, he little thought that the police officers were so near at hand.

And yet, perhaps the very boldness and confidence which this want of knowledge gave him added considerably to his success in reaching unperceived the grounds belonging to the hall.

At one side of this building was a long, peculiar stretch of woodland.

In some places the trees grew so densely that it was almost impossible to force a passage between their trunks, in others the trees were wide apart.

Nevertheless, the line of what might almost be called forest was unbroken.

It stretched away for a distance of upwards of two miles—one end far in the open country, the other close to the eastern wing of the hall.

So conspicuous an object as this could not fail to be perceived, and Tom King immediately made his way towards it at the nearest point, feeling sure that beneath its umbrageous shades he should be better secured from observation than elsewhere.

Just then, before the officers reached the summit of a hill commanding this portion of the country, Tom King trotted his horse gently beneath the overhanging boughs.

He was in a moment lost to sight.

He glanced around him with considerable curiosity and interest.

The wood was one of great antiquity, as was evidenced by the gigantic size of some of the trees, and he could also tell that human footsteps rarely pressed the ground over which he was then passing.

Under cover of this dense foliage, it was the easiest matter in the world for Tom King to draw quite close to the hall without being seen by anyone, and this was the first thing he set about attempting.

He came at last to one portion which had evidently been set aside as a plantation.

Game was abundant, and at every step he disturbed so much that Tom began to feel apprehensive that the unusual commotion among the inmates of this place would betray his presence.

For this reason, he turned off to the right, intending to skirt the plantation as much as possible.

In doing so, he found that its width was not great, and that one side of it bordered the road leading from the village up to the hall.

From the plantation a full view could be had of the road for a considerable distance; but as no one seemed near, and as no sound broke the silence, Tom pushed steadily on.

Passing the plantation, he came to what was probably, many years ago, a shrubbery.

But now the dwarfed trees of which it was composed had been suffered to grow wild.

The winding paths were choked up with weeds and brambles, and the whole place had that aspect of neglect and desolation which so soon shows itself when any cultivated piece of land is allowed to return to a primitive wildness.

This was as near to the hall as Tom thought it would be prudent to venture.

Accordingly, he sought a retired spot, which he only reached by forcing a passage for himself and steed through what was almost an impenetrable thicket.

Here removing some of the trappings of his horse, he unbuckled the rein on one side of the bit and used the thong of leather as a means to prevent his horse from straying too far away.

He secured him with it to the branch of a tree in such a manner, however, as not to prevent the horse from feeding at pleasure on the tall, luxuriant grass that was everywhere around.

The steed being thus disposed of, Tom began to look about him for some place where he might seek repose himself.

A long time had elapsed since he had taken any rest, and he was fully conscious that if he could only lie down somewhere and go to sleep, he should awake greatly refreshed, and that it would do his wound more good than ought else.

But for the pain he felt in his arm he would have climbed one of the trees and concealed himself among its dense foliage.

This, however, he felt to be quite out of the question.

It is certain that if the highwayman had had the least suspicion that the police officers were so near at hand—that, in fact, they were absolutely upon his track and searching for him in every direction—the thought of going to sleep would never have entered his mind.

Pushing his way through another part of the thicket, Tom suddenly found himself in view of a strange, ruinous, yet picturesque-looking building.

He did not need a second glance to show him that at some time or other it had been a summer-house, and there were indications that it had been most tastefully built and decorated.

Now the woodwork, of which it was chiefly composed, was thickly overgrown with green moss, the growth of which was not a little promoted by a large pool of stagnant water that partially surrounded it.

Although so close to Wilfr Hall, it would have been easy for anyone to believe this ruined summer-house to be miles and miles from any human dwelling.

Profound silence was around—such a silence as is found only in the depths of a huge wood.

"It seems to me," murmured Tom, to himself, "that no one has trodden these neglected, moss-grown paths for ages, and I should think few people would visit that rotten old summer-house from choice. I think I might venture to enter it, and lie down there to sleep—at any rate, let the risk be what it may, I will do so."

Without another moment's hesitation, then, Tom King stepped quickly across the little open space before the door of the summer-house, and entered the building.

A strong, disagreeable odour of dead leaves and decaying vegetation saluted his nostrils, and the atmosphere within was so damp that it sent a shiver through his entire being.

"Not over comfortable quarters," muttered Tom, his teeth chattering slightly as he spoke. "Yet still I may be safe, and, after all, that is the principal consideration, even though I do catch an ague by sleeping here."

A dim, dusky kind of twilight prevailed in the interior of the summer-house, and so he had to grope his way forward until he reached the side opposite to the doorway.

Then, selecting what seemed to him the darkest corner of all, he gathered together a number of dry leaves that had been blown in by the wind, and, having arranged them something in the shape of a couch, lay down to sleep.

So entirely was he overcome by long want of rest, fatigue, and the exhaustion consequent on the loss of blood he had sustained, that scarcely had he settled himself in a tolerably comfortable posture than his eyes closed, and in a few moments he was in a deep slumber, from which it would have required some very unusual noise to have awakened him.

How long he might have remained in this position he knew not, and had no means of ascertaining.

He fancied, however, at last, that he began to dream, and his dream was that two persons were at no great distance from him, conversing together in low but earnest tones.

He strained his ears and listened, but, to his surprise, could not make out a syllable of what was said.

Then shortly afterwards he became aware that he was not in reality dreaming, but that he had just woke up from his deep sleep.

He almost started with surprise when, on opening his eyes and looking around him, he found that the interior of the summer-house was much darker than it was when he closed his eyes.

Then it was only dusky and obscure—now it was profoundly dark, save and except that he could perceive through the open doorway a small patch of night sky.

But the voices continued, and the next thing Tom was cut was that two persons were standing near the door of the summer-house conversing with each other.

"Do not think of leaving yet, Ernest," said a voice, the tones of which sounded strangely familiar to Tom's ears—"do not think of leaving yet. Who can say what changes may take place when Roderic returns?"

By the time the voice had finished speaking, Tom was able to make out where he had heard it before.

It was as he was leaving the hall early in the morning.

"I will stay, Ellen, if you wish it," said a male voice—"I will stay, because I can refuse nothing which you ask."

"I care not for the reason," was the faint reply, "so

that you promise to remain. I have a kind of presentiment that Roderic will smooth over all matters and make your absence at all unnecessary."

"You speak like one ignorant of the world," was the reply. "Your brother cannot but be fully aware of his true position—he must know that, once again recognised as Sir Ralph's son, he will be entitled to rank with the first gentlemen in the county. He will naturally expect that you will do something to extend, or, at any rate, keep up his influence, and when he learns that you have been so unwise as to bestow your affections on a humble dependant like myself—"

"No, no—not unwise—surely not unwise!" she interrupted.

But her companion, without heeding the interruption, continued:

"And above all, when he learns that I have been so forgetful of myself—so base, so ungenerous as to make known my own affection, his breast will be filled with anger, he will forget the happy days we spent together years ago—he will have me driven ignominiously forth."

"Oh, Ernest," answered the young girl, speaking with difficulty through her tears, "you fill my heart with sorrow, and yet I trust that in all you say you may be mistaken. I know my brother better than you do; besides, there is my father, and if he could once be relieved from my stepmother's influence, I am sure he would gladly give his consent and approval, for you are a favourite of his, and he so much values my happiness that he would refuse me nothing."

"Well, well—it may be so," said the young man, soothingly, "but I am afraid to flatter myself with such hopes, lest my disappointment should be greater than I can bear."

"At any rate, promise not to be hasty; do not leave here until I have seen Roderic, and until you have seen him, too."

"I promise readily; and now, although I would gladly linger, let us leave this place; the air is cold and damp, and cannot but injuriously affect you. A few more moments of happiness, then we must part."

With a slow, lingering step, the lovers left the doorway of the summer-house.

As soon as they had departed, Tom King rose to his feet.

"Oh," he ejaculated, "that's how the land lies, is it? Well, I comprehend the situation of affairs at the hall much better than I did. And as for you," he continued, glancing in the direction the lovers had taken, "I will try what my intercession can do on your behalf. Now, then, for action."

When Tom emerged from the summer-house he glanced around him, but found no one in sight or hearing.

Accordingly, he gave himself another hearty shake, endeavouring by this means to promote the circulation of his blood, for his sleep on the damp leaves had chilled him to the bone.

This done, he looked to his weapons, and having seen them in proper order, moved off in the direction of the spot where he had left his horse.

When just about to break through the thicket, however, he heard a slow and heavy footstep somewhere close at hand.

He became motionless instantly, and bent all his energies to the faculty of listening.

The footstep became more and more distinct, and Tom fixed his eyes in the direction from which the sound came.

Then emerging and growing as it were out of the surrounding gloom, he perceived the bulky figure of a man.

Tom did not venture to breathe.

He trusted that the trees close against which he stood would render him invisible.

Nearer and nearer came this man, and on a closer approach Tom recognised him.

It was the man he had seen tampering with the letter-bag—the under-steward, in fact, for such was the post he was supposed to fill.

Tom began to be afraid that his intention was to penetrate the very thicket close to which he stood; but his alarm on this point was quickly dissipated, for the under-steward turned sharply to the left, walking on at the

same sharp pace, and taking a course that was comparatively speaking free from trees.

Tom watched him until he was almost out of sight, and then he thought to himself:

"Surely the chief thing I have to do in this affair is to keep the closest possible watch upon this man and his proceedings. What can I do better than dog his footsteps and see where he is going at this lonely hour with so much secrecy and caution?"

Almost before he had finished these reflections, Tom King was treeling stealthily and noiselessly in the steps of the under-steward, following him like his shadow, and screening himself from observation by means of the thick trunks of the old trees.

He was not long in finding that the direction the under-steward was taking led to the plantation.

He did not penetrate into its recesses, however, but kept upon its outer edge until he again turned to the right, and was almost lost to sight among the underwood.

Tom followed closely, but with redoubled caution, for not only was the nature of the ground such as to render noiseless progress almost impossible, but just then the full moon rose up clear and bright from behind a low bank of clouds on the horizon.

All at once the under-steward paused, and so did Tom.

The two men were then something more than a hundred yards apart.

Tom crouched down among the luxuriant undergrowth, and fortunate it was that he did so, for the under-steward, turning round, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked peeringly and scrutinisingly in every direction.

Then, apparently satisfied that he was alone, he himself crouched down behind the massive trunk of a huge tree, that probably had been blown down by the wind.

So great was the thickness of this fallen trunk, that, when the under-steward crouched down behind it, he was almost hidden from observation.

Tom wondered what he could want there.

But for the rustling and sighing of the wind among the tree-tops, a profound silence prevailed.

Time passed on.

The under-steward made no movement, but Tom King, little by little, decreased the distance between them.

Higher and higher rose the moon, and presently Tom found, on getting nearer to the under-steward, that the position the latter had taken up was such as commanded a full view of the lane leading from the village to the hall, along which Tom King had himself so lately passed.

Just as he made this discovery, Tom King remembered the strange-looking firearm which he had caught the under-steward so sedulously polishing, and then it flashed into his mind with great suddenness and with the full force of a conviction, that this man was lying in wait there for some one, who would be favoured with the contents of the weapon.

Tom determined to creep closer still, so as to baulk him in his purpose, but just then he heard a faint sound, and directly afterwards the dusky-looking figure of a man, wrapped in a large riding-cloak, came into view.

As he advanced, the moonlight shining upon him displayed his form with great distinctness.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE ASSASSINATION IN THE WOOD AT WILFIRS CROSS.

As quick as thought the under-steward raised his gun.

He rested the barrel upon a projecting branch of the old trunk, and took a rapid yet steady aim.

Tom guessed his aim: purpose, and sprang forward.

But his interference came too late.

There was no sound, no report, or puff of smoke, but the stranger in the cloak uttered an odd, gasping cry, clasped his hands over his breast, and fell heavily to the ground.

It was at this moment that Tom pounced upon the under-steward from behind.

A yell of fear and rage broke from his lips when he found himself roughly grasped.

"Villain—murderer!" cried Tom, closing with him, and putting forth his best strength; "you have been seen, and shall at least reap the reward of your villany!"

The sudden surprise bereft the murderer of all his strength and presence of mind.

He became immediately as helpless as a child in the highwayman's hands.

Tom picked up the gun, in which he felt strangely interested, and with the other hand twisted tightly into the thick neckcloth of the under-steward, he dragged him forcibly in the direction of the spot where the wounded stranger lay.

How bitterly Tom regretted not being in time, for his heart told him who this stranger was.

Most certainly it was the baronet's eldest, disowned son, making his way back to entreat his father's forgiveness.

Now he had been cut short by death, or, at least, Tom feared so, for the distance was so short, and the steward's facility for taking aim so great, that it was scarcely possible for him to have escaped a fatal injury.

Yet this was a point he resolved to ascertain without delay, and so, as we have said, he dragged his prisoner after him.

The plantation was only separated from the lane by a hedge so low that Tom had not the least difficulty in stepping over it.

The steward tried to step over it too, but he failed, and was scratched rather unpleasantly by the thorns.

"Down on your knees," said Tom, as soon as he reached the middle of the lane—"down on your knees, villain, and if you make a single movement it shall be your last! Mind that!"

Tom produced his pistol as he spoke, then bent down over the cloaked figure.

Tom did not perceive it just then, but a remarkable change now came over the under-steward's countenance.

Absolutely it seemed to stiffen with horror. His jaw dropped, and his eyes assumed a strange, glaring stare, his fingers worked convulsively, and he seemed as though he was struggling to gasp out some word.

He bent forward, too, as far as he was able, and in his anxiety to catch a glimpse of the stranger's countenance he evidently forgot his own peril—forgot everything.

But the stranger having fallen to the ground upon his face, Tom was under the necessity of rolling him over.

This was quickly done, and then his features were clearly revealed by the light of the clear, shining full moon.

The countenance disclosed was that of a young man, probably not more than five-and-twenty years of age, but upon whose face there was the mark left by long days and nights of dissipation, and although all the features were now in calm repose, the face was a most unpleasant one to look at.

An awful wringing cry coming at this moment from the under-steward's lips made Tom start up, then, looking at him, he noted the change we have described.

The murderer fought madly with his hands; he struggled and tugged at his throat as though there was something there that impeded his utterance—something that he could tear away.

At last, after many ineffectual efforts, he dragged himself forward on his knees for a few paces, and flung himself upon the inanimate body.

"Alfred—Alfred," he cried, in tones that were truly awful to listen to—"my boy, my son, look up! Do not remain so still! Surely you are not dead—you must not, cannot be! Awake—awake! Oh, what wild, foolish folly was it that brought you to this spot to-night? Speak—make some slight movement—show me that you are yet alive!"

But no movement followed, nor could the anxious man detect a breath.

With trembling, unsteady fingers he undid his son's apparel, and endeavoured to place his hand above the region of the heart.

This revelation, so awful, and made so unexpectedly, had for a moment or so the effect of paralysing Tom King completely.

He could only stand quite still, gazing on without sound or motion.

"Then this is not Roderic?" he managed to exclaim at last. "You are sure it is not the baronet's son?"

The under-steward looked up at him wildly, and with his face convulsed with anguish.

He seemed as though about to speak.

Whether such was his intention cannot be known, but just then they were interrupted by the sharp clatter of a horse's feet.

Tom King was on the alert instantly, and an ejaculation of annoyance escaped his lips.

The last thing he wanted was an interruption.

But the sound rapidly increased in loudness, and then, looking up, Tom perceived a single horseman come into sight.

At the same time it was evident this new-comer saw something unusual was taking place in the lane, for he checked the speed of his steed somewhat abruptly, as he called out:

"Hullo there! What's the meaning of all this?"

While speaking he did not discontinue his progress, but came on at a more gentle rate.

The under-steward crouched down and endeavoured to conceal himself from observation.

"Surely," thought Tom to himself, "this is the baronet's son. Had he arrived a little sooner that would have been his fate."

He glanced at the body of the under-steward's son while he spoke, then looking up and raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"Am I right, sir, in taking you to be Mr. Roderic Cromer, the eldest son of the baronet up at the hall yonder?"

"Yes," was the answer, given in pleasant, cheerful tones, "that is my name. How came you to know it?"

"I merely guessed it," was the answer. "Congratulate yourself upon your narrow escape from death."

"Death?" ejaculated Roderic.

"Yes," said Tom. "Give me your attention for a moment, and I will endeavour to explain all."

Then Tom, in as few words as he possibly could, made Roderic acquainted with all those particulars which the reader knows already.

His revelations were listened to in mingled anger, surprise, and incredulity.

While speaking, Tom had a good opportunity of gazing at the young man's face and figure with attention, and he could not help remarking to himself how great a contrast he afforded to him who now lay so motionless on the dusty roadway.

Roderic's countenance was open, manly, and had such a cheerful expression upon it as won all hearts, and attracted everyone towards him.

No traces of cunning, villany, or debauchery could be seen there.

"And it is you, Peterson," Roderic ejaculated at length, dismounting from his steed as he spoke—"it is you who have contemplated this dreadful deed! Well, the retribution that has overtaken you, though terrible, is no more than just."

"I am in doubt," said Tom, "whether the young man is really dead or not; it may be that he is only wounded."

Peterson looked up, and shook his head slowly and sadly.

In so doing his face was revealed, and Tom King started with surprise when he perceived how great a change had been wrought in it.

It seemed, indeed, as though in the space of those few minutes he had grown at least twenty years older, and such an aspect of suffering was visible that the heart would have been hard indeed that did not melt at the sight of it.

"He is dead!" he moaned, wringing his hands—"quite dead—dead by my hand! Let me go! I am a miserable, wretched man now, and this sorrow, which I shall carry to my grave, is surely punishment enough for what I have done! Let me go, and I will confess all—I will tell you everything!"

Tom King did not offer to speak, but left the decision with Roderic.

He, on his side, hesitated, for he scarcely knew as yet in what relation Tom stood to the whole affair.

"Do not refuse me!" pleaded Peterson—"grant my request, and I will tell you something well worth your knowing—will confide in you a secret which otherwise shall never pass my lips. Let me go, and let me take the body of my poor boy with me! That is all I ask, and you shall never see me again in life."

"Be it so," said Roderic—"I give you my consent. Go—depart freely."

"Then I will tell you the secret of which I spoke. To commence, I need scarcely inform you that it was through your stepmother's influence that the baronet's heart was steeled against you—that he at last drove you forth from the hall."

Roderic smiled bitterly.

"I do know it," he said—"I know it full well."

"Ah! then, but you cannot guess what is coming," continued Peterson. "Your stepmother is an artful, wily woman, full of all kinds of stratagems, and possessing an imperious will, which makes all things bend before it."

"I need not describe now how it was that she became Sir Ralph's second wife; let the fact be sufficient. But when she married she was already a wife, though she knew not where her husband was, or whether alive or dead."

"I was her husband," continued the repentant man. "I married her long years ago. I could not brook her evil, overbearing temper, and so we parted."

"We had one son—you see now all that remains of him; and yet I loved him with an intensity you cannot imagine."

"At last, after a rough life, I learned by accident what had become of my wife. I came here intending to expose her and have her driven forth, but she saw me; we had some conversation together."

"She asserted her old influence, and I fell passively into her plans. They were to deprive you of your birth-right, and to obtain possession of all Sir Ralph's wealth and estates; and to do this all the more surely, our son Alfred was to be brought forward at a convenient time, and to be married to Sir Ralph's only daughter."

At these words, Roderic started and frowned, while an angry exclamation escaped his lips.

"Forgive me all this!" said Peterson, more humbly than before. "If I have sinned deeply my repentance is proportionally great. Our schemes have come to nought."

"At her suggestion, I posted myself in this place. I consented to become a murderer. I had intercepted your letter, and I knew that you would pass by this spot on your way to the hall. But that my boy Alfred should be anywhere in this neighbourhood at the present time I never for one moment guessed, and, in my haste and excitement, mistook him for you."

"My plans were all well laid. The assassination was performed with this air-gun, which, deadly as a musket, could be discharged without a sound. The place is lonely, and you would have had a grave beneath these bushes."

The young man shuddered from head to foot, and well he might, for few, if any, could hear such an avowal as this unmoved.

"Now, then," Peterson added, after a brief pause, "I have told you all—everything! You have but, on your return to the hall, to proclaim who and what your stepmother is—to call her by her real name—to cover her with confusion and discomfiture. What you will do with her I know not. I dare not intercede on her behalf, and yet I trust you will be merciful."

With these words, the under-steward again turned round, and, with a heavy, gasping sob, threw himself at full length upon the dead body of his son, where he remained convulsed by bitter anguish.

Roderic and Tom remained for a few moments gazing upon him; then the latter, by a rapid sign, beckoned for the other to leave the spot.

His wish was gladly enough complied with.

"Let him go," said Roderic—"let him go. I would not pursue him for the world. Truly enough has his own crime brought its own bitter consequences with it."

"It has," said Tom; "and I rejoice to find that you have acted in such a spirit!"

"And you," Roderic exclaimed, gazing at Tom, "I know not who you are. But give me your hand, for I am certain you are a friend to me and mine, and that is all I wish to know; henceforth we are brothers in friendship!"

The words were spoken in an access of generous enthusiasm, and Tom felt his liking for this young stranger momentarily increase, while he rejoiced to think

he had been so instrumental in restoring him to his true position.

"Come," said Tom, "accompany me to the hall, where your father is anxiously awaiting you."

"Does he forgive me?"

"Freely—entirely! Ask him, and observe the result."

"My brain whirls," said Roderic. "I had anticipated nothing of this—I had no idea that such a conspiracy was afoot."

"Calm yourself," said Tom. "Say no more until we reach the hall; by that time you will be able to recover your composure. And as for myself, I have enough to do in thinking over my own future proceedings."

This seemed so strange a remark that Roderic fixed his eyes upon Tom's face with undisguised amazement.

Tom pretended to be oblivious of it.

Silently, then, and rather slowly, this strange pair made their way along the winding lane towards the hall, the picturesque roof of which quickly came in sight above the trees.

"There is the old place!" cried Roderic, pausing to gaze upon it. "I seem carried back years and years to the time when I was a happy boy. It glads my heart to see the old place once again, and to know that I return with the prospect of forgiveness before me."

"It is something more than a prospect," said Tom King; "you may look upon it as a certainty. Nothing will ever give your father so much joy as his reunion with you."

CHAPTER CXLVI.

IN WHICH TOM KING FINDS THE DIFFERENT EVENTS AT THE HALL COME TO A CLIMAX.

It was easy to see that young Roderic Cromer was deeply affected by his return after his long absence, and though Tom's last speech was such as would naturally call forth some remark, he passed it over in silence.

Nor was another word exchanged between the pair until the entrance of the hall was gained.

Tom King knocked loudly at the portal, and at the same time rang the bell vigorously, while, addressing his companion, he exclaimed:

"You must be prepared to make a sudden rush as soon as the door is opened, otherwise, when it is known who we are, we shall be refused admission."

"Right!"

Just as he pronounced the words, the door was opened, and Tom King did indeed make a sudden rush, and a much more violent one than was at all necessary.

The hall porter, not at all expecting such an attack, was thrown completely backwards and jammed with great force against the wall.

"There," said Tom, as he stepped across the threshold—"I rather think that will do as a commencement!"

Roderic smiled sadly.

Then a door was abruptly flung open, and upon the threshold stood the baronet's wife.

Her face was crimson with rage.

"Villain—wretch!" she shrieked—"begone! You shall not stay beneath this roof another moment! Already you have caused more than enough unhappiness. Begone!"

Just then she caught sight of Roderic.

Although many years had passed since she had seen him last, she recollected his features well—recognition was immediate, and it caused her no little confusion.

She knew well enough what it was the under-steward had set out to do, and could not understand how it was he had failed in his mission.

"Ahem!" said Tom, placing one hand upon his breast, while with his other he took off his hat and bowed profoundly. "I can assure you we are very sorry to intrude thus upon you, Mrs. Peterson."

Tom King watched carefully to see the result produced by the pronunciation of this word.

He found it all that he had expected.

The woman's face turned to a ghastly paleness, and she staggered back as though about to fall.

"False—false!" she said—"it is all false! I deny it!"

"Deny what?" said Tom. "I have accused you of nothing."

"But why did you call me by that name?"

"Simply because I know no other by which to address

you. You have no sort of claim whatever to that of Cromer."

"Indeed, insolent!" she faltered. "But——"

No doubt she was going to give utterance to some threat, but Tom King interrupted her.

"All your plans are known," he said, "and if you are wise you will beat an immediate retreat, and be thankful to us for having allowed you the opportunity of doing so. Yes, I repeat, we know every detail of your scheme; we had it from your first and real husband's lips not many moments since. He has confessed all. Among other things, that you prompted him to take up a position in the wood and assassinate Mr. Roderic here as he passed by. Some one approached, and the dreadful deed was done, the stranger fell; but it was a mistake, and the wretched man discovered afterwards that he had shot down his own son."

A piercing shriek came from the woman's lips, and it was palpable that only a tremendous effort of her powerful will saved her from swooning.

"Alfred?" she gasped, half in a whisper.

"Yes, such is his name; and if you are speedy you will catch sight of him lying in the lane, near the plantation, and your husband with him. Go—quit this roof now while you are able, otherwise you will be expelled!"

Abashed, mortified, and humbled, Mrs. Peterson began to retreat, step by step, backwards towards the door opening at the rear of the hall.

Sobs and groans came from her lips; tears, too, rose in her obdurate eyes; but she struggled with all her might against these manifestations of emotion.

Tom pointed with his finger towards the door, and unable any longer to meet the gaze of the two young men, she turned round, and, opening the door, hastily disappeared.

"Now she is gone," said Tom King, "and this roof is rid of a most unwelcome tenant. Now for your father. Let me break the news of your arrival to him. Do not enter hastily, the shock will be too great."

Remembering the apartment in which he had formerly seen the baronet, Tom King made his way there once more, and found him seated in the same position in the easy-chair.

But he took not the slightest notice of Tom's entrance, and it seemed by his attitude as though he had expired.

The cry that this unexpected sight wrung from Tom King's lips reached the ears of Roderic, who was listening outside.

With a few sudden bounds, he reached the apartment; then, comprehending all, he sank down on his knees at his father's feet.

The first shock over, Tom approached, and as he did so he fancied the old man slightly breathed.

Finding quickly that he was not mistaken, he exclaimed:

"Look up, young sir—look up! He has only fainted."

Such was the case.

The old man had borne up well enough until he heard his son enter.

He had tried to rise from his chair and bid him welcome, but he was seized by a deathly faintness, and sank back, unconscious of the rest.

Knowing the scene that would ensue, Tom King, as soon as Sir Ralph was restored to consciousness, retired to another room, where he sat pondering deeply over this succession of strange events.

There he remained for some time; but at length he was aroused by the entrance of Roderic, who, extending his hand, said:

"Come with me, young sir—come with me. I can never thank you sufficiently for all you have done in my and my father's behalf; but at present we are strangers to your name. Who is it that we have to thank for this good service?"

"Never mind my name," said Tom. "It is one, I trust, unknown to you, and let it remain so. But if you feel yourself under any obligation to me, it will be more than cancelled if you will allow me to remain beneath this roof for a few days—until, in fact, my arm is somewhat better."

"Are you wounded?"

"Yes—only slightly, in the left arm; yet it occasions

no great anguish and inconvenience. Rest is all that I require."

"Then you shall have it," said the impulsive young man, "and the best of surgical assistance that we can procure. But come—hasten with me to Sir Ralph, and let him hear again from your lips the narrative of all these strange occurrences."

Tom King complied.

But, of course, there is no need to repeat what was said on this occasion.

He availed himself of the opportunity, however, to speak of Roderic's sister and her lover Ernest.

By the crowd that gathered on the old man's brow, Tom fancied that at any other time than this his intercession would have availed little.

Now, however, he was unable to refuse any request.

The young couple were summoned speedily to the room, and when they entered they were surprised to see how great a change was wrought in Sir Ralph.

From the moment that he knew his second wife had left the hall—that there was no fear of her return, and that she had not the shadow of a claim upon him, he seemed to become a new man—twenty years at the least seemed to be taken off his age.

Before the mutual congratulations were over, the unexpected sound of the revolution of carriage wheels made itself heard, and directly afterwards a carriage was drawn up at the chief entrance.

"Who can this be at so late an hour?" exclaimed the baronet, in great surprise.

"I can give you an answer, I think," said Roderic. "It is your old friend Richard Grant."

"But at what an extraordinary hour to pay a visit!" ejaculated Sir Ralph. "What can be the meaning of it?"

"There I am quite as much at a loss as yourself," replied Roderic. "At my earnest solicitations he set out from his own residence, in order to see you personally in the matter of my return. He was to have made his visit first—in fact, he intended to arrive soon after his letter. What can have delayed him until now I cannot think."

At that moment a voice was heard outside in the entrance-hall, and no sooner did the tones strike upon Tom King's ears than he gave a sudden start.

There was something familiar in them—he was quite confident he had heard that voice before.

When, where, or under what circumstances, however, he could not possibly call to mind.

Nor was he left much time for speculation.

The door was thrown open, and a stout, florid, good-looking, yet rather aged man entered, accompanied by a lady.

Tom King shrank back slowly, and endeavoured to get out of sight.

He had recognised the old man at the first glance, and, what was more, remembered under what circumstances he had met him.

It was the very gentleman he had met and stopped the night before, and whose grey horse was even then in Tom's possession.

Whether this Mr. Grant would recognise him was another matter; but at any rate, the highwayman resolved to give him no more chance than he could help, so accordingly he stooped down over a side table and pretended to be busily engaged in looking at some magnificent coloured pictures in a book.

He listened eagerly, nevertheless, to the conversation that ensued.

The greeting between them was most cordial, and the two old men, who had been parted in friendship for so long, were quite overcome by their feelings.

Mrs. Grant, who was with him, was a tall, thin lady, with pinched features, and a general slenderness of outline.

She was of a restless, ever-moving disposition, and quickly engrossed the conversation to herself.

To such a degree did she rattle on, that scarcely anyone else had a chance of putting in a word.

"And would you believe it, my dear Sir Ralph—and yet, of course, you will believe it when I tell you—but how surprised you must have been at a visit at such an hour as this. Well—well, quite a long history is connected with our delay."

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Grant, interrupting her, trusting

to be able to relate the whole of the circumstances in about one-half as many words as his good lady occupied. "I ought to have spoken of that sooner, and to have made you an apology."

"Oh, no apology is necessary from you."

"Well, but, d—n it!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "Excuse me, I beg, but I have reasonable grounds for swearing. I was fairly on the road for this place last night—in fact, I was about fifteen miles off—perhaps more or less—when we were stopped by an audacious villain, in the shape of a red-coated highwayman."

"Highwayman?" ejaculated all present.

"Yes. It would seem that he had a great many of his companions concealed behind the hedge, or, at least, he said he had, but I scarcely think he spoke the truth. However, to make a long story short, he robbed me of my purse. I defended myself as well as I could, but the pistol I discharged, and the contents of which I hoped to lodge in the villain's skull, took effect upon his horse, and the animal fell down at once quite dead. Strange as it may seem," added Mr. Grant, "that fall saved the rascal's life, for my man, Thomas, with more valour than discretion, had, unknown to anyone, climbed up on to the top of the coach, where he stood with his long, heavy wand in his hand, with which he was in the act of dealing the highwayman a terrific blow, when the horse fell. The consequence was, the wand swinging through the air encountering nothing, and such was the force of it that it threw Thomas off his balance, and down he fell head foremost into the road."

Ejaculations of astonishment greeted this extraordinary narrative.

Mrs. Grant made a great many attempts to join in, but her husband held his ground manfully.

"Not content with robbing me of my purse," he continued, "the villain declared that, as I had deprived him of one horse, I should furnish him with another, and so he had the consummate impudence to cut one of my leaders out of the harness, saddle and bridle him before my eyes, and then ride off."

"But Mrs. Grant," said Sir Ralph—"was not she frightened to death?"

"Literally to death," replied the lady, seizing upon the opportunity to speak—"in fact, when I saw the odious ruffian, and learned his errand, I fainted clean away."

"And consequently know nothing of what happened," interrupted her husband.

"Until I saw the officers arrive," she put in.

"Just so—just so. The officers came up very opportunely; they saw the highwayman mounted on my steed, and gave him good chase. I don't think they had the ghost of a chance of success, for their own horses were miserable things and dreadfully jaded, while the one he had got was the best grey in my stable, and quite as fresh as a daisy."

"But yet," said Roderic, with a smile, "if this happened last night—or, rather, I should say, the night before last, for it is already morning now—it, I fancy, scarcely accounts for so much delay as this."

"True, my young friend," was the answer—"true! But after the officers had disappeared from view, we had to turn our attention to Thomas. He was dreadfully hurt, and no sooner did my wife see him than she went off into another fainting fit. There was I, with only three horses to the carriage, and fifteen miles from your house. Luckily, I remembered that a friend of ours—you may know him: Mr. White—lived at hand, so we managed to get there as well as we could. After our arrival, my wife became much worse, but Thomas got better. However, in a short time everything was arranged, friend White lent me one of his horses, and away we started once more. But fate was surely against us, for in the middle of a narrow lane the hind wheel came off the carriage, and brought us unpleasantly to a dead stop. However, I pass over that to say that we got it repaired with much difficulty, and at last reached here."

"And all this trouble has been on my account," said Roderic. "How can I express my thanks?—how can I show my obligation?"

"Why, by saying nothing about it, to be sure."

In a hasty, fragmentary fashion, Mr. Grant had been made acquainted with what had occurred at the hall.

Tom listened with great uneasiness, and wished himself

out of the room, but he saw no chance of retiring unperceived.

All at once, Roderic exclaimed:

"What we should have done but for the aid of this generous stranger, I know not. In all probability, I should not be living at the present moment. Let me make him acquainted with you. Ah! he is there!" Roderic continued, as, looking round and not seeing Tom at first, he afterwards caught sight of him near the table.

Our old friend was now in a rare fix, but he could only hope that Mr. Grant would not recognise him; and certainly nothing could be further from his thoughts than to imagine that the man who had robbed him should be standing beneath his old friend's roof.

"Here he is," said Roderic, leading Tom King forward. "I have much pleasure in owning that he is henceforth my bosom friend."

"Oh! just so. Glad to—see you, sir. But God bless my life and times! Eh?—what? Is it so?"

Mr. Grant rubbed his eyes vigorously before he could recover himself from his state of bewilderment.

His wife, who had been scanning Tom's appearance, uttered a shriek.

"That's the villain!" she exclaimed—"that's the villain! There's the rascal who robbed us, and rode off on our horse. Seize him—seize him! He's a highwayman!"

"Surely," said Roderic, laughing, "you are both the victims of some extraordinary delusion."

"No, no!" said Mrs. Grant, with great excitement. "No delusion at all; or if I am, these gentlemen will quickly set me right. Look—look! As I live, yonder police officers are coming. Well, who would have thought of meeting with them twice running, just at the very moment you wanted them?"

These words produced more effect upon Tom King than upon anyone else in the room.

This may easily be imagined.

He turned quickly to ascertain the truth or falsity of what the lady said, and then, to his intense astonishment and surprise, beheld rather a large troop of police officers, and among them was the familiar form of Elisha Coles, the apothecary.

"The game's up!" murmured Tom, to himself. "I'm done! That villainous old druggist has somehow contrived to get the police officers upon my track. However, I'll make one bold rush to escape."

CHAPTER CMLXVII.

TOM KING FINDS HIMSELF PURSUED BY NOTHING BUT ILL LUCK.

It would require many pages to describe minutely the different feelings which occupied the minds of those persons assembled in the breakfast-parlour at Wilfrid Orms, and even then it is doubtful whether anything like a clear conception of them could be conveyed.

It will be best to leave it to the imagination of the reader, and to proceed with an account of the incidents that so rapidly followed.

Roderic still held Tom King's hand within his own.

He was speechless with surprise; but certainly most incredulous respecting all that Mr. Grant had said.

He believed him the victim of an extraordinary delusion.

Tom King saw this, and determined to turn it to his advantage.

"I have done you good service," he said—"you admit that, and therefore you ought not to care who I am. Let me confess I did stop your friend last night on the highway, and I am known generally as Tom King. You start, and with surprise; perhaps something like anger finds a place in your breast, yet I feel it is not asking too much of you to assist me to escape."

"I will defend you with my life," was the impetuous reply. "Who or what you are I care not—it does not alter in any degree the service you have rendered."

"Well spoken," said Tom, moving swiftly to the door. "But I shall not require any such sacrifice at your hands."

Just then a tremendous hammering came upon the front door of the hall.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HOLD A CONSULTATION.]

Mrs. Grant, with another shriek, sprang across the breakfast-parlour, and dashed the window open.

"Officers—officers!" she cried. "This way—this way! He is here! The villain has robbed us all this way!" Tom King waited to hear no more, but shut the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock.

"Now I am all right!" he exclaimed, addressing himself to Roderic. "Farewell! It is doubtful whether we shall ever meet again—farewell!"

He wrung his hand as he spoke.

"But," said Roderic, "where are you going? How can you hope to escape these men?"

"I know where I have left my horse," was the reply, "and can gain him easily. Leave me to myself; do not get into trouble by appearing to aid me. Rest assured that all is well, and that I am now tolerably safe. Again farewell!"

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"Farewell!" said Roderic, sadly, at the same time releasing his grasp.

With rapid bounds, Tom King hastened to the door, the position of which he was so well acquainted with.

Then, having passed through it, he took his course in a direct line for that portion of the plantation where the ruined summer-house was situated, and close to which it will be recollected, he had left his horse.

In the exciting events which had occurred, all remembrance of the gallant creature had been driven from his mind, otherwise he would have seen that it had been better taken care of.

And yet it is questionable whether Tom King did not owe a great deal of his safety to this forgetfulness, for had the horse been placed in the stable it would have been unsaddled and unbridled, in which case much delay must have taken place in getting it ready for the road.

Now the horse had all his trappings on him, and Tom had nothing to do, after gaining his steed, save to vault into the saddle.

Just as he plunged among the trees in the shrubbery, he looked back, and saw the officers coming round the angle of the hall at full speed.

They raised a loud shout, and from this he judged correctly that he had been seen.

With flying steps he made his way to the summer-house.

On gaining it, he paused a second for breath, and then dashed through the thicket, heedless of the injuries he received in doing so.

His heart bounded with joy when he saw his horse was there just as he had left it.

Seizing it by the bridle, he again pushed through the thicket at the least densest part, then wound rapidly among the trees until he reached an open space, when he sprang into the saddle.

He made his way now towards the lane.

He reached it easily and quickly, yet not before the officers had seen him and given another loud, thrilling cry.

That they were fully in earnest Tom did not for a moment doubt, and so he gave his steed the rein, and determined to trust the rest to its fleetness.

The officers came on in rare style, and here we may take occasion to remark upon what may at first sight seem rather strange, namely, that they did not make their appearance at the hall sooner.

But the fact was, Elisha Coles himself and all the officers looked upon Tom's assertion that he had been sent down to the village by Sir Ralph as an impudent, false assertion made for the purpose of gaining his ends.

Therefore, all the time they had been searching about high and low, though it was pretty clear they did not penetrate the thicket where Tom had left his horse.

At length, however, they had made their way to the hall.

This movement was owing chiefly to the police officers, who believed they were once more balked, though they had an excellent excuse for going to the hall and making a few inquiries, trusting in the event of doing this that some refreshment and hospitality would be offered to them.

The result is known to the reader, and so need not be dwelt upon any further.

One more fact remains to be stated, and that is, in their search during the day they had managed to get so far as the next town, where the closest inquiries satisfied them that no one resembling Tom King in appearance had passed that way.

Here they were so fortunate as to be able to secure fresh horses in exchange for those they had ridden so far. Moreover, these steeds were of rather more than average quality, therefore the police officers were delighted accordingly.

It will thus be seen that they had every advantage in their favour on the present occasion.

They had got a clear view of the highwayman, and all they had to do was to hang persistently upon his trail until they ran him down.

Tom King, however, by no means despaired.

Not only had he a most excellent opinion of the merits of the grey horse he had so singularly come into possession of, but he had received from the owner of the animal a very flattering testimonial, for it will be remembered Mr. Grant called it the best there was in his stable.

By this time, however, the eventful night had almost passed away.

Morning had not yet come, but it was cold, chill, and miserable.

Without the occurrence of any particular incident, the chase was continued for a long time across the level open country, Tom King keeping a tolerably straight line, choosing his course where the land seemed best adapted for speed.

He pushed his horse to the utmost, for he knew morning was coming on, therefore he was anxious while it was yet dark to find some place of concealment or some means of baffling his foes.

The report of the sky had altered greatly.

Summerless clouds had made their appearance, and it

was only at occasional intervals that the moon poured forth her light.

This was in the highest degree favourable to Tom, and he noted it with the utmost satisfaction.

Still, as time passed on, he began to grow anxious.

His chances of finding some hiding-place before morning had much diminished.

All that remained for him to do was to continue urging his horse onward, and this he did until the speed attained was dangerous in the extreme.

So rapid was it that Tom noticed with great joy that the officers kept dropping further and further in the rear of him, until at length, when the moon broke out clear and bright from among the clouds, he looked back and failed to perceive any sign of them.

But the country was level and open about that part, affording him no chance of concealment, and therefore, although it appeared that urgent speed was not quite so pressing as it had been, he did not draw rein in the least.

Suddenly, however, the faint report of a gun reached his ears.

The sound came from so far off that he was unable to determine its precise direction.

Yet he glanced all round him keenly, and shortly afterwards another discharge reached his ears.

While galloping on at this fearful rate he came suddenly upon a hedge dividing the meadows from the high-road.

He could not check the progress of his steed, so the obstacle was cleared, and the hedge on the other side of the road as well.

Then he heard a loud and, as it seemed to him, an angry shout.

He turned in the direction of it, and to his intense astonishment found himself close to another troop of officers, so close that it was the greatest wonder in the world he had not ridden over them.

"Twice," he muttered, "I have had this ill-luck. Why, the whole country must be up in arms. Well, no matter, I have escaped hitherto, and my horse is good for another long gallop."

So saying, he applied the spurs with great vigour, and before the officers had time fairly to get in pursuit of him he had succeeded in obtaining a tolerable start.

The reader will well understand this incident, and remember how Dick Turpin was at that time concealed in one of the trees, though this was an idea that never once entered Tom's imagination.

The report he had heard proceeded from the carbine which it will be recollected the guard of the mail-cart fired so many times in the trees in the hope of dislodging Dick Turpin.

While the officers continued the pursuit they were not a little mystified at the incident which had occurred.

They could not for the life of them make out by what means Dick Turpin could have obtained a horse so quickly, and marvelled how he should come riding back in that direction.

That it was Tom King who was before them, and not Dick himself, they never guessed, and even had they known it, no alteration would have been made in their actions.

One highwayman was to them almost as good as another.

They were anxious to obtain the reward offered for their apprehension, and nothing further.

It was the first chance too that these country constables had had of pursuing the redoubtable highwayman whose name was so familiar to their ears, and they continued on their way, running a hundred risks of their lives, intent on effecting a capture, and quite undaunted by the many failures that had attended others.

Tom King's horse, however, was now beginning to show signs of great exhaustion.

It was with difficulty only that he kept him going at the same pace, and every now and then he could feel the gallant animal tremble and stagger beneath him.

On such occasions as these Tom King would contemplate pulling up, and he would glance back at his pursuers.

On each occasion, however, he saw them distinctly, for the officers flogged and spurred their own cattle most awfully.

And all this time Tom had been looking for a hiding-place.

Dimmer and dimmer became the moon as she sank still lower in the western sky, and every moment he expected to see her light succeeded by the grey dawn of early morning.

If during the darkness he was unable to shake off his fancies and to conceal himself, how could he hope to do so when morning was pouring its full rays upon him?

As he asked himself this question an anxious, distressed look came over his countenance.

He wiped away the perspiration that gathered in large bead-like drops upon his forehead, and again looked back.

The officers were in sight, though he fancied the distance between himself and them had slightly increased.

He tried to improve this advantage by accelerating his horse's speed.

But in this attempt he failed most signally, and began to grow apprehensive that ere long the horse would founder altogether.

Struggling on, he again reached the high-road.

With a last, despairing, convulsive effort of strength, the horse leaped over the low hedge which divided the meadows from it.

It came down heavily and almost fell, but Tom, by a sudden jerk upon the reins, saved it.

Then he felt that whatever his horse might be able to accomplish now, certainly it would never be able to take such another leap.

Under these circumstances, then, he had no resource save that of continuing his way along the high-road, and this, as will be remembered, was a thing Tom always shrank from doing even under the best of circumstances.

A disagreeable conviction that ere long he would be overtaken began to creep over him.

He tried to shake it off, yet vainly.

Soon afterwards the police officers reached the high-road as well—in time, indeed, to perceive Tom King making his way at some distance.

They noticed with exultation the exhausted condition of his horse, though the animals they bestrode were scarcely in better condition.

Yet they shouted and waved their arms, and encouraged each other to keep up the chase with unabated speed.

Tom King at length coming to a narrow lane which branched off from the high-road he was pursuing, pulled up abruptly and turned down it.

It was dark, and so thickly overshadowed with the branches of huge trees planted on each side of it that it seemed almost like riding into a tunnel.

Again a disagreeable feeling came over him like a shudder, and after he had turned down this lane he regretted having taken the step, though without knowing wherefore.

Once more making the effort to shake off this nervousness, as he termed it, he bent all his energies towards urging his horse onward.

It was just possible that the officers might not notice he had taken this narrow turning.

The lane was very serpentine in character, and underneath the horse's feet was nothing but soft, springy turf, showing how very rarely travellers passed that way.

It was fortunate for Tom, for his horse's hoofs made scarcely any sound.

Suddenly, however, the aspect of this lane changed.

The trees were succeeded by high stone walls in no place less than ten feet in height.

Tom glanced from side to side of him with apprehension.

But there was no such thing as turning back, even had he wished it, for already he could tell by the faint sounds that floated to his ears that the officers were making their way along the lonely lane.

A few yards further on was another abrupt bend.

Turning round it, Tom King uttered an ejaculation of vexation and despair.

The end of the lane was before him.

It was composed like the sides of a high stone wall, which in the centre was pierced by a massive iron door large enough to allow any vehicle passing down the lane to go through it.

But this door was closed, and, by the manner in which

it was overgrown with moss and ivy, had not been opened for very many years.

"Trapped," said Tom, as he wiped the perspiration from his face once more—"trapped at last: there's no escape; here they come!"

He had paused, and having looked at the high stone walls and massive gates, feeling sure that it was impossible to proceed further in that direction, he had turned his horse's head round, so that now he faced his pursuers.

He could hear them coming on at great speed, and from the cries and shouts to which they gave utterance, he fancied they were well acquainted with the nature of the place in which he had taken refuge, and that they were full of joy at having trapped him so securely.

A dark, angry look, expressive in the utmost degree of determination, settled upon Tom King's countenance.

He allowed the reins to fall on to the neck of his panting, exhausted steed, then deliberately produced his pistols, and having examined their primings, waited, with one in each hand, for the officers to approach.

In another moment at the most they would turn the last bend in the lane and be upon him.

CHAPTER CMLXVIII.

FOLLOWS FOR A BRIEF SPACE THE SINGULAR FORTUNES OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

THE pale, grey morning light that, creeping over the whole face of the earth, making all things more distinctly visible than they had been before, and which found Tom King in a position of so much peril, was the same that reached Dick Turpin and Maud in the recesses of the old stone quarry.

Gladly would we return to them, or relate what further happened to Tom King, but having brought the narrative up to this point, it is necessary to go back and relate the adventures that befel Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack during the three days and nights when their comrades underwent so many strange vicissitudes.

This done, all will once more flow on smoothly.

It will be remembered, then, that when the highwaymen parted in the wood at the rear of the Three Spiders Inn, they each chose different directions, and in doing so it happened that Tom King and Dick Turpin emerged from the western side, so that the open country lay immediately before them.

Sixteen-String Jack, with whom we will deal first in choosing an opposite course, of necessity emerged on the eastern side, or that which was nearest to London, and though he made use of all the circumspection in his power he was not able to leave the shelter of the trees unseen.

A loud voice, coming from he knew not where, it reached his ears so suddenly, cried:

"Surrender!" and scarcely had the word been pronounced than a pistol was discharged.

The bullet was a harmless, useless one, for Jack, by a rapid movement, had altered his position—this rapid movement being consequent upon the start of surprise he gave when he heard some one call out so near to him.

Yet that movement most unquestionably saved his life.

Knowing his danger, he at once set spurs to his horse's flanks, and the next moment was flying off at full gallop.

So rapidly did all this take place that Jack had no time to consider which direction he should take; all his thoughts, indeed, were centred upon getting away from his pursuers as soon as possible.

It was not until he had gone for some considerable distance that he turned his thoughts in this direction, and having done so, he looked around to ascertain where he was.

He found himself upon the Oxford Road, with his horse's head in the direction of London, to which place he was galloping at full speed.

"It won't do to keep this course," thought Jack; but although he was fully aware of it, he did not just then see any chance of making a change.

He paused soon afterwards and listened, and, though faintly, yet he could hear distinctly in the distance the clatter of horses' hoofs—a greater clatter than could be produced by a single pursuer, and therefore he imagined that the officer who had made so treacherous an attack

upon him had met with some of his companions, who had agreed to join him in the chase.

"Forward yet!" said Jack. "There's nothing better, I am convinced. In a little while something to my advantage will probably turn up."

He galloped on again, nor did he draw rein until he perceived dimly in the distance before him the dusky-white outline of a turnpike gate.

He gazed at it for a few seconds, then listened.

This time, however, although he stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost, no sound of his pursuers was audible.

Then he dismounted rapidly and placed his ear upon the ground.

This made a great difference, for he was now able to detect a succession of rapid shocks.

"They come," he said—"they are still upon the road, and, if I linger, will be soon upon me."

So saying, he vaulted again into the saddle.

"Now which way shall I take," he murmured. "Wfly, that must be Tyburn toll-gate, yonder. Let me see—Tyburn—Tyburn? Surely that was the gate where Tom King found so warm a friend; it may be that the man is still there, and if so, the stratagem that served Tom so well will serve me also."

Jack was half inclined to make the trial, for he knew nothing would be of so much advantage to him as getting the officers on the road before him, so that he could turn back and retrace his course, in which case he would have the extreme satisfaction of knowing that every step he advanced took him two steps away from his foes.

Debating this point in his mind, he rode slowly up to the toll-gate, unable to decide whether he should try to make a friend of the keeper or not.

As the hour was late—or more strictly speaking, early—the gates were closed and fastened, so upon reaching them Jack had no other resource than to call out to have them opened.

In a few moments a man appeared, whose appearance corresponded tolerably well with the description Tom King had given.

"Open the gate," said Jack, "and be quick about it!" "All right, governor; but don't be in such a blessed hurry! Blowed if I haven't left the key indoors!"

"Then," said Jack, as he pulled a guinea from his pocket and tossed it to the man, "perhaps that may enable you to move with a little extra speed."

The tollkeeper looked searchingly into Jack's face, and then putting his finger by the side of his nose in a very waggish, knowing manner, he said:

"Many thanks to you, captain! I know you are one of the right sort; you have no need to say another word to convince me of it. Perhaps you may have heard something of me before; but at any rate, if you want a service done, just say the word, and pay me well, and I'm the man to do it."

These words, and the manner in which they were muttered, enabled Sixteen-String Jack to come to a decision.

"Good!" he said. "I have heard of you; and you once rendered a service to a particular friend of mine and I should be glad if you would render one to me as well. Do you know what I mean?"

"Well," said the tollkeeper, removing his pipe, "I think I do. Your friend was the one that I shut up in the house here, along with his horse. Aha! that was a good joke! Whenever I think of it I begin to laugh, and when I begin I never know when to leave off. It was a very rich—so very rich indeed!"

"I can reward you well for this service," said Jack; "and you will believe me when I say that the officers are in full chase of me, and not very far in the rear. Listen, and you will hear the hoofbeats of their horses."

"I can hear 'em, captain; I heard 'em from the first. Lor' bless you, you don't think I've been tollkeeper here all these years without being able to tell what was coming a long distance off? I'm quite used to it."

"No doubt," said Jack. "But if you intend to conceal me, be quick about it; there cannot be much time to lose."

"There is not," said the man. "Wait half a second; I will fetch the key."

He vanished into the toll-house, and appeared again almost immediately, carrying the key in his hand.

With this he unlocked the gate, and allowed Jack to pass through.

Then, carefully fastening it again, he said:

"Now dismount, and lead your horse in by the bridle. I hope it is a quiet animal."

"Pretty well," said Jack. "I think I can control it."

"Well, you'd better. You will remember, of course, how much depends upon silence. If your horse neighs or snorts, or tramples about with her feet while the officers are outside they will know what's o'clock at once; then you'd find yourself in rather an awkward fix."

"I should indeed!" said Jack, slowly, and with a certain amount of misgiving. "I have scarcely dwelt upon that; it is truly running a great risk."

"Why, so it is; you speak truly."

"As great a risk as it would be to gallop on," continued Jack, speaking more to himself than to the tollkeeper.

"Well, there I can't agree with you," was the answer, "so, if you are going inside, make up your mind at once; it will never do to stand dallying thus."

"I will risk it," said Jack, suddenly. "Tom King managed safely—why should not I?"

"I see no reason why not. Come on, captain, I'm sure you've chosen rightly."

Jack slipped off his horse, and, taking the animal by the bridle, he patted it for some time upon the neck, so as to quiet it into as composed a state as possible.

The tollkeeper then held open the door of his little house, and Jack led his horse over the threshold.

As soon as the animal was fairly inside, the door was closed again.

"Now, captain," said the tollkeeper, "I just recollect that somewhere or other I've got a handful of oats and a little bit of hay; if we put this down it will, ten to one, do more towards keeping your horse quiet than anything else."

"Very likely," said Jack. "But you must be speedy in your movements, for I can hear the officers now quite plainly."

"Oh, all right, captain! You leave them to me," said the tollman, in a very confident tone. "I know how to manage them, I rather think."

The oats and hay were produced and given to the horse, who began to nibble away at the provender with very great satisfaction, seeming quite inclined to remain perfectly quiet.

Directly afterwards there was a prodigious clattering of hoofs outside, and a loud shout coming from many throats.

"Gate—gate!" they cried. "House—house! Open quickly! Do you hear?"

"Oh, go at it!" said the tollkeeper, quite composedly, and never offering to move an inch. "Go it, my ancient cripples! You will have to call again before I come out!"

Sixteen-String Jack did not feel any easier than he had done—in fact, we may safely say that his uneasiness increased as every moment elapsed.

The officers bawled out again, and this time they accompanied their words with shaking violently at the gate, and hammering away upon it with the butt ends of their heavy riding whips.

"Had you not better go?" said Jack. "You will exasperate them—perhaps awaken their suspicions by this delay."

"No, captain, not a bit. You leave this 'ere job to me; I know how to work it. You look after your horse, and don't interfere; if he gets frisky the game's spoilt for both of us."

Jack knew this well enough, but was in a fever of impatience for the tollkeeper to go out and let the officers through.

His anxiety was soon at an end, for the man, having considered that the officers had waited long enough, opened the door and stepped out.

No sooner did he make his appearance than he was greeted by a whole volley of imprecations.

"Oh, then," ejaculated the tollkeeper, apparently taking no notice of the state of rage the officers were in, "so the gentleman was right, after all?"

This was a very enigmatical remark as much for Jack as the officers, who stared at him in surprise.

"Why, you skulking idiot!" cried one, "what do you mean by that?—what are you talking about?"

"Oh, he's right—he's right!" said the tollkeeper, and as he pronounced the words he advanced with the key in his hand, and undid the padlock.

"Here—here, my fine fellow," said the chief officer, as they passed through, "what do you mean by keeping us waiting like you did?"

"Why, I 'cause I thought it was all gammon."

"What was 't gammon?"

"Why, what an inquisitive man you are! Would you stop on your business, and keep me here in the cold, just for the sake of answering few questions?"

There was a silence among the officers at this, and they waited for the one who had command of the party to speak.

This officer advanced a little from the rest, and, sinking his voice to what he intended to be a very solemn and warning tone, he cried:

"Look here, Mr. Tollkeeper: I've had my suspicions of you for some time, and I shall keep an eye upon you—mind that! You know who we are—we are officers of police."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the tollkeeper, pretending to be convulsed with mirth—"ha, ha, ha! Why, so you are! Well—well, now, that's what I call an excellent joke—oh, it's capital! I never guessed it would be half so rich as this!"

These words put the finishing touch to the officer's patience.

"You grinning fool!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by talking such d—d nonsense? What is there to laugh at, I should like to know?"

"Well, wait," said the tollkeeper—"wait, and in about two words I will tell you all about it. Are you all listening?"

"Of course we are!"

"Well, then, about five minutes ago, or it might be ten, or perhaps even more than that."

"Oh, d—n you! Never mind being so particular about the time!" roared the officer, in his impatience. "Can't you see we're in a hurry?"

"Well, I thought you were," said the tollkeeper, composedly, "but why do you stop here?"

"To know what you have to tell us," was the answer.

"In one word say have you seen a man mounted on a first-rate bay horse?"

"Oh, yes," said the tollkeeper—"many a time!"

"But I mean to-night, you fool—I mean within the last few minutes!"

"Well, yes, I have," was the reply. "That was just exactly what I was going to say."

"Oh, was it? Well, go on, then—why don't you speak out?"

"I thought I was," answered the tollkeeper, with great gravity. "But, however, I should think it must now be nearly a quarter of an hour ago since I heard some one ride up and bawl out 'Gate—gate—open the gate!' So I jumped up in a minute, and ran out to see who was there."

"Well—well, what did you see?"

"Why, a man in a tall hat seated on the back of a first-rate bay horse."

"That's him," cried the officer—"that's him—that's him!"

"I know that."

"Oh, you know it, do you? It strikes me you are too knowing by half, and I shouldn't wonder if some day your knowledge doesn't bring you into trouble."

"Well, there's some consolation in thinking," replied the tollkeeper, "that you will never have to fear anything on that score—I'd warrant that for a thousand pounds!"

At this there was a roar of laughter among the officers—a roar of laughter at the expense of their chief, who was so furious with rage that he swayed to and fro in the saddle like a drunken man, and seemed in imminent danger of pitching to the ground.

"As I said," continued the tollkeeper, not wishing, perhaps, to push matters too far—"as I said I saw this chap on a bay horse, so says he to me:

"Open the gate quickly—I'm in a hurry."

"So I did, and I said:

"Tuppence—tuppence!" And what do you think he gave me?"

"A guinea, perhaps?" guessed one of the officers.

"Yes," said the tollkeeper, with pretended admiration.

"You must be a conjuror! That was exactly the amount. So I said, 'Wait a moment, sir—wait a moment, and I will fete you the change.'"

"And then says he:

"Oh, no, my good fellow—keep it for yourself. I'm in a hurry; but a party of friends of mine are on the road behind me. I have outstripped them, my horse is such a good one. But they will be coming on at full pelt, so, when you hear them, let them through the gate, and take the money for doing so out of that guinea. The change you can keep yourself."

"Why, d—n his impudence!" roared the chief officer, recovering himself. "Do you mean to tell me that he said that?"

"Do you mean to call me a liar?"

"Oh, stuff—stuff! Why don't you answer my question?"

"Well, of course he said it! Didn't I tell you as plainly as ever I could speak that he said it? And no sooner had he spoken the words than he was off towards London like the wind. But I was only half awake, you know," continued the tollkeeper, "and didn't notice him particularly, and I thought he was quite in earnest in what he said. I never dreamed he was a highwayman, and that officers are in pursuit of him. But, oh! what a rich joke it is. Why, I shall never forget it to the last day of my life! It's grand!"

But the officers did not seem to appreciate the joke half so well, and the one in command, riding back to his fellows, said, in a low voice:

"I've got my suspicions of this fellow, but we'll serve him out another time. I can see through the scheme quite well—perfectly well!"

"Oh, can you?" was the whispered question coming from the lips of many officers.

"Yes; no doubt Sixteen-String Jack bribed him to delay us all he could, and he has managed it very cleverly—I must say that. He counted upon getting a good start, and now he's got it, and no mistake! We cannot do better than ride on. We must learn news of him before we go much further. Are you agreed to that?"

"Oh, quite—quite!"

"Then follow me," was the answer, and then the chief officer, turning round to the tollkeeper, who had strained his ears in a vain attempt to catch what had been said, he exclaimed: "Good night to you, my clever friend—good night! But it's d—d odd to me if I don't interfere with your pleasant little occupation one of these days, and put a stop to it."

"You be blowed!" said the tollkeeper, sulkily, and as he uttered the words he turned round, walked into his little wooden house, and slammed the door shut behind him.

CHAPTER CMLIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MEETS RATHER SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY WITH HIS OLD COMRADE CLAUDE DUVAL.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, as the reader will readily believe, felt by no means comfortable while this humorous scene was taking place between the police officers and the tollkeeper—in fact, it may be affirmed that he saw nothing humorous in it, and bitterly repented having trusted himself with this man.

He considered that to behave as he was behaving was like playing with a lighted match close to a barrel of gunpowder.

However, the highwayman was at last released from the tender hooks of suspense on which he had remained so long, by the tollkeeper returning to his house.

Just as the door was slammed the police officers, with a parting curse, struck spurs into their horses' flanks and galloped off.

The idea that had taken possession of their minds was a very reasonable one indeed. What could be more probable than that this tollkeeper should undertake to keep them waiting at the gate as long as he was able?

Convinced that nothing else would help them but speed, they continued at a rapid rate, and soon the sound of their horses' feet completely died away.

Not till then did Sixteen-String Jack venture to speak.

He first drew a long breath of relief, then he ejaculated:

"Thank goodness, they have gone at last!"

"Yes, at last," said the tollkeeper, wiping the tears from his eyes, which laughter had brought there. "Oh, I shall never forget this night! It's a glorious joke—a magnificent joke! I would not have missed it for a thousand pounds!"

"Well," said Jack, "whatever I may have felt a short time ago, I am by no means disposed to quarrel with you now, because I cannot help admitting that you have brought affairs to a very happy conclusion. I am much beholden to you, and you will find that I am the last man in the world to allow any favour to go unrequited."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said the tollkeeper, "as I shall not be above receiving whatever you in your generosity may feel disposed to give, simply because there is no knowing what charge the officers may bring against me, or how soon they may get me turned out of my present situation; then I should want some kind of recompense."

"You shall have it," said Jack, "and have it freely. I will give you my word that before many nights are over you shall receive much more in return for this service than ever you could expect."

"Right!" said the tollkeeper. "You come by your money easy enough, and therefore you ought to part with it freely. Upon my word, it's a jolly life, and I've a good mind to turn highwayman myself."

"Just as you like," said Jack. "But I think now, with your permission, I will make myself scarce."

"Yes, yes," said the tollkeeper, "by all means. I ought to have told you that myself. There's a probability that they will stop somebody and make inquiries before they go much further. It is impossible to say, indeed, how soon they may learn that no one answering your description has passed along the road."

"That's precisely what I thought myself," was the reply; "and so, as they are riding so comfortably on to London, I shall take just the opposite direction, and very soon there will be a good distance interposed between us."

"So there will," said the tollkeeper; "and though I am sorry to part with you, yet I cannot ask you to stay."

"Open the gate then," said Jack, "and I will be off. I needn't tell you who I am. Perhaps you may guess it."

"Yes—Sixteen-String Jack, or I am much mistaken."

"The same," was the answer. "And if you know anything of me you must be aware that when once I pass my word for a thing I never go back from it. I have spoken to you about the reward: depend upon it it shall be yours ere long."

"That's quite sufficient. And now just wait a moment or so while I open the gate."

With these words the tollkeeper passed out into the open air again, his object being not merely to open the gate, as he stated, but also to ascertain that there was no one loitering about.

He glanced around him as well as he could in the darkness which prevailed, but saw no one, and he was just about to insert the key in the padlock when the faint but unmistakable sound of a horse's feet reached his ears.

He listened attentively for a few seconds, then hastened back to Jack.

"There's some one coming!" he exclaimed.

"On horseback?"

"Yes, listen, and you will hear the sound."

Jack listened, and then cried:

"Yes, I hear it plainly, but it is only one horseman who is approaching."

"Right," replied the tollkeeper—"it is probably only some chance traveller; still, if so, let him ride by without seeing you, otherwise the officers will soon get on your track."

"You are perfectly right," said Jack. "I will wait until he passes."

"He is coming along in good style," was the tollkeeper's next remark, "and he is going towards London. It may be one of the police officers who has been left behind by his companions."

"If such is the case," said the highwayman, "the closer I keep myself the better. However, our suspense will soon be over."

"True," responded the tollkeeper, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and refilled it. "Here he is now, close enough."

By the time he had completed the operation of igniting the tobacco, the horseman arrived at the toll-gate.

He struck sharply upon it with his riding-whip, and called out:

"Gate—gate! Open!"

When Sixteen-String Jack heard those words, he uttered an ejaculation.

"Hush—hush!" whispered the tollman. "What on earth is the matter? Why, you will be heard to a certainty!"

"No matter," said Jack—"that's a friend of mine: I know his voice well enough! I would swear to it from a thousand! What in the world can bring him in this direction?"

"Are you sure it is a friend?" said the tollkeeper, anxiously.

"Yes—yes!"

The hammering on the gate was repeated, and another loud outcry made to be allowed to pass through.

But the tollkeeper seemed to think that part of his duties consisted in making everyone wait who happened to arrive when the turnpike gate was closed.

He sallied forth at last, striving all the time to keep Sixteen-String Jack back.

But the highwayman followed him closely, and took the first opportunity of peeping over his shoulder at the horseman so as to make sure there was no mistake.

The oil lamp that was burning dimly on one of the posts shone on Claude's countenance with sufficient distinctness to enable Jack to recognise it at once.

He darted forward with a cry of satisfaction, but Claude, never suspecting such a meeting as this, stood immediately on his guard, for he could not tell but what this meant a sudden attack upon him.

"Claude—Claude!" cried Jack. "Is it possible you do not know me? It is your old comrade Sixteen-String Jack!"

"Impossible!"

"Look at me and see! I have by the merest chance in the world escaped from the police."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Claude, shaking his comrade warmly by the hand; "I was full of alarm on your account."

"It would have gone hard with me," said Jack, "but for our friend, the tollman, here. He is the same who did Tom King such a good turn some time ago. Do you recollect?"

"Yes, perfectly well. Is your horse inside?"

"Yes, I will bring him forth."

"I should never have suspected it," said Claude. "I should think it is a trick that might be played upon the officers over and over again."

"I should never like to try it another time," said Sixteen-String Jack. "You cannot imagine how I felt standing there inside while they were surrounding the place, and, as I might say, within reach of me."

"Not very pleasant either, I expect; but come, the sooner we make a move the better."

Jack was entirely of this opinion, so while the tollkeeper unlocked the gate, he led his horse out and mounted.

"Remember," he said, as he trotted through, and placed himself by the side of Claude Duval—"remember what I have promised you. I shall not be able to keep my word to-night, nor could I say for certain I shall be here to-morrow; but wait a reasonable time with patience, and you will find there will be no room for complaint."

"Right, captain—that's quite enough. Good night to you both!"

"Good night!" was the answer, and as the words were pronounced the highwaymen put their steeds in motion and trotted off.

"Well," exclaimed the tollman, rubbing his hands briskly together and shutting himself up in his house, "if the officers don't come back here before long and kick up a jolly row it's odd to me!"

This reflection, however, did not deter him from very

deliberately making every preparation for retiring to rest.

Here we will leave him, and follow our two friends who had met thus unexpectedly.

They trotted on at a rapid rate for some distance without exchanging a word, and then Sixteen-String Jack, unable any longer to restrain his curiosity, tightened the rein a little, and exclaimed:

"Come, Claude, tell me how it is I find you here? What can have happened to bring you to Tyburn Gate?"

"You will laugh at me, no doubt," was Claude's rejoinder, "but after we had made up our minds to separate I felt far from comfortable. We have been so much in the habit of going together everywhere that I felt lost without you. While giving way to these thoughts, I gradually rode out of the wood, and emerged just in time to see that treacherous attack made upon you, and to witness the officer start off in pursuit."

"Indeed!" said Jack, "I never guessed that. But what followed?"

"Why, the officer soon got others to join him, and away they went after you like so many hounds after a fox. I stood considering for a little while, wondering which way I should go, then took it into my head the best thing I could do was to pursue the officers."

"Pursue the officers?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, I knew you would laugh at so droll an idea, but mark you, I intend to keep a safe distance from them. I thought while I was riding—and I was quite certain they were on the road before me—there was little to fear from them."

"True enough," said Jack. "And that's what brought you here?"

"Well, partly. But you must also know that I indulged in the hope of being able to come up with you before long. I made quite certain that you would adopt some stratagem or other to throw your pursuers off the scent, and so I had resolved to make inquiries—of course with caution—all along the road until I learned something of you."

"But fortunately," said Jack, "there was no occasion. You don't know how rejoiced I felt when I heard your voice."

"No doubt," said Claude, "and it is agreeable that now we have met we should continue together during the time that has been fixed?"

"Yes, with all my heart! I should like to do all things."

"That, then, is comfortably settled; and now, Jack, for an account of your adventures."

"You know all, or nearly all; however, I will give you the details."

Jack did so, and concluded by saying:

"Now you see, Claude, we left the Three Spiders in such a hurry that I neglected to provide myself with any money at all, and I suppose you are in the same predicament?"

"Precisely."

"Well, then, I have promised the tollkeeper he shall be rewarded."

"He deserves to be."

"I feel it so, and therefore I propose that we take advantage of the first adventure that presents itself and turn it to good account."

"With all my heart once more!" said Claude. "And it is so long since I had a little sport on the highway that I look forward to it with real pleasure."

The two highwaymen being thus of one mind, got on quite capitally together.

Having made their arrangements so far, and listened for any sounds that might betoken the presence of police officers, they carefully set to work to examine the condition of their weapons.

Claude's pistols were unloaded, but luckily both himself and comrade were well provided with ammunition—in fact, they took good care never to travel anywhere unless thus provided.

"We shall miss the comforts of the old inn," said Claude, as he rammed a bullet into his pistol. "We have had no difficulty in getting ammunition lately, or whatever else we required—now we shall find it very different."

"Very different indeed!" said Jack. "If we had only

had a little notice we might have provided ourselves with a supply that would have lasted some time."

"Make the best of it—make the best of it! We have managed well hitherto, and I see no reason why we should not continue to do so."

"Yes," was the answer. "But I would give much to know what took place at the inn after our departure from it. For that, however, we must wait—it will not do for us to venture near."

"Not on any account. But hark! something is coming."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite. Listen!"

Both highwaymen stopped, and then, distinctly enough, they heard a horse approaching, the clatter of his feet being accompanied by the rattle of wheels.

"It's a gig," said Claude, "or something of that kind. Very likely we shall get our little business over at once. At any rate, be the approaching traveller who he may, he shall be stopped."

"Yes," said Jack, "I am quite determined upon that point. Remain where you are. I will take up a position on the opposite side of the road."

Sixteen-String Jack carried out his intention while he spoke.

Having crossed the road carefully, he backed his horse as close under the hedgerow as he could, so as to remain concealed in the shadow.

Claude Duval did the same thing, and certainly it would have required a very piercing vision to have made out their figures as they stood there.

A profound silence was now maintained.

The highwaymen had got their weapons in readiness for instant use, and they listened with a slight degree of impatience to the ever-increasing noise made by the rapidly-approaching vehicle.

CHAPTER CML.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE AN ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

"CLAUDE," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a low tone of voice, "keep where you are; I will manage this little affair, which I consider as being peculiarly my own."

"As you like," returned Duval, carelessly. "I will remain a looker-on, unless I see something which may make my interference necessary."

"Good; no more. Silence, or we shall be overheard."

Not another word was spoken, and the highwaymen, as they looked along the road, perceived with a tolerable amount of distinctness that it was a kind of gig that was nearing them, drawn by a large light-coloured horse, and seated in it could be perceived the dusky forms of two persons.

In a few seconds afterwards the gig was near enough for Jack's purpose, so he rode out with great suddenness from his place of concealment into the middle of the road.

"Hold!" he said. "If you value your lives, pull up! Hold, I say!"

His sudden and unexpected appearance evidently took both travellers by surprise, and perhaps it was more the astonishment into which they were thrown than a desire to comply with this strange demand that made the one who was driving tighten the reins.

Sixteen-String Jack easily kept up by the side of the gig.

He had his eyes wide open, and keenly on the watch for everything.

Yet he was taken by surprise by the rapidity with which one of the travellers drew a pistol from his belt, and, quickly cocking it, pulled the trigger.

There was a snap and a flash, but no report.

"Don't try another," said Sixteen-String Jack, "otherwise I shall feel bound to try a shot. As it is, I am willing to let you both go uninjured provided you will only allow me something you can well spare."

"Our money, watches, and so forth," said the one who was driving, in an angry voice—"that's what you consider we can spare, is it not?"

"Just so."

"Then, Jim," he added, in a different tone of voice, and addressing his companion, "may I be d—d if I as

here by your side and submit to be robbed by one man! We'll make an effort to keep what we have got!"

"You are playing with your safety," said Jack. "It would have been easy for me to have returned the shot that was aimed at me, and rely upon it there's no fear that my pistol would miss fire. Quick! Hand over what I require, and you may continue your journey as if nothing had happened."

"That's cool!" said the traveller. "Nothing happened, indeed! No, no, my spurs—you will have no money or valuables from either of us without fighting for them!"

"If that's your humour," said Jack, "I will accommodate you. But two to one is rather long odds, so I must have assistance."

Jack purposely raised his voice while uttering these words, in order that Claude Duval should hear them.

Scarcely had the last word left his lips than, with a sudden bound, Claude Duval placed himself on the opposite side of the gig.

So swiftly did he make his appearance, that it really seemed as though he had either sprung up from the earth or else been dropped from the clouds.

The appearance of another highwayman altered the feelings of the travellers altogether.

The one who had proposed to fight it out, quietly took down his whip, and began to rummage in his pockets.

"I give in," he said—"I give in. I have not sufficient value about me to make it worth while to risk my life to retain it. Take this—it's what ready money I have. I have bank-notes in my pocket-book, but they will be no good to you, for the numbers are all taken."

Claude took from the traveller a tolerably weighty purse, and, as he dropped it into his pocket, he exclaimed:

"Hand over your watch, and you may keep your bank-notes. Do not say that I have not treated you fairly."

The traveller laughed, but in a most unmusical manner.

With great reluctance he pulled his large watch from his fob, and dropped it into the highwayman's outstretched palm.

In the meanwhile, Sixteen-String Jack had been similarly occupied.

The man who had endeavoured to shoot Jack had lost touch of his self-possession by the failure of his attempt, and certainly he never for a moment dreamt of contesting with two men.

"There you are," he said, giving Jack his watch and purse—"take them, and let us drive on. But hark you, my fine fellow, I've had a good look at you, and sha'n't forget your appearance for some time, and if I can put the officers on your track, depend upon it I shall do so!"

"Thanks—thanks!" said Jack, in an indifferent tone, as he made an ironical bow. "You are now quite free to drive on."

The travellers did not wait to be told twice but the one who was driving took up his whip again, and gave his horse a smart cut with it, and away they went with a rush.

"This is luck!" said Jack. "Between us, surely we have enough to satisfy the tollkeeper. I have half a mind to ride back to him, and so get the matter over at once."

"I think it would be best not," said Claude. "Morning is close at hand, and we ought to be on the look-out for a good place of shelter. Rely upon it, the country will be up in arms in a very short time."

"It will be best. The more we keep out of sight in the daytime the better. Where do you propose this, we should bend our steps?"

"I hardly know. But hark! I fancied just then that I heard the sound of approaching horsemen."

Jack assumed a listening attitude immediately, but just then a slight squall of wind had sprung up, which made an odd whistling noise among the tree-tops, effectually drowning all slight sounds.

"I hear nothing," said Jack, at length—"at least, nothing but the wind."

"Nor I now, but still we will push onward as fast as we can; we are as yet much too near to London to be safe."

Just then the wind dropped, and, to the astonishment

and no slight alarm of the highwaymen, they heard with great distinctness the approach of a large body of mounted men.

Looking back in the direction of London, they could perceive a troop of officers galloping towards them, and a little in the rear could be seen the gig with the two travellers seated in it.

They were waving their arms in an excited manner, and pointing along the road.

"Confound it, Jack," said Claude, "they have got close upon us, and quite unawares. We shall have to look sharp now, you may make up your mind to that."

"I should only like to know," said Jack, "whether the officers are the same who passed me at the toll-gate; if so, they will be so enraged at the trick that has been played them that they will strain every muscle to capture us."

While these few words were exchanged, the highwaymen had been making their way onwards at a rapid speed.

Still, despite their efforts, the officers were much too close to them to be pleasant.

At length Claude spoke.

"Jack," he said, "I have an idea, and I hope you will fall in with it at once."

"What is it?"

"Let us separate."

"Separate? Why, I thought you said a while while ago—"

"Yes, yes—I know that! But separate only for a short time. Don't you see, if we do so, the effect will be that our pursuers will be divided. In that case, shall we not have a much better chance of effecting an escape? Recollect how close it is to daylight."

"It's a good plan, Claude, and we will adopt it. But where shall we meet, and when?"

"To-morrow night," said Claude. "Suppose, now, that you turn to the left and I to the right? We will make our way in a kind of semicircle—do you understand?—and to-morrow night we will meet somewhere on this road. I will wait for you till daybreak."

"Agreed! Let us part now, for the officers are disagreeably close."

"No matter," said Claude—"our manoeuvre will decompose them in no slight degree, or else I am altogether mistaken."

The officers were quite overjoyed to think they had managed to approach the highwaymen so closely, and they did all in their power to decrease the distance which now intervened between them.

Suddenly, however, to their great consternation, they saw the highwaymen divide, one taking to the meadows on one side, the other on the opposite one.

"Curse them!" said the one in command. "That's double trouble! Still, we have no resource but to divide also. I will go after that villain yonder, and you, Hopkins, take charge of half the men and follow the other one."

The police certainly deserved some credit for the rapid manner in which they divided themselves into two parties; and having done so, they each took to the meadows, so that in a much shorter time than Claude had believed, he found they were again upon his track.

The two travellers, however, were compelled to pause in the middle of the road.

It was impossible for them to continue the chase any further, though they would have liked above all things to do so.

They remained watching the officers until they disappeared from sight; then, with a most crestfallen air, they turned their horse's head once more towards London.

But quick as the officers were, the highwaymen had managed to obtain a very excellent start, and Claude, having only himself to look after, bent the whole of his efforts to the task of urging his horse onwards at its utmost speed.

Preserving the course he had mentioned, he galloped rapidly on.

The ground favoured him exceedingly, being composed of little else but smooth pasture land.

But whenever he looked behind him to observe how near his pursuers were, he perceived the faint grey tinge of light in the east growing brighter and brighter.



[DICK AND MAUD, IN THE OLD QUARRY, LISTEN TO THE APPROACH OF THE OFFICERS.]

He did not draw rein until he had succeeded in reaching the summit of a piece of rapidly-rising ground.

Then from this elevated position he took a careful view around him.

The light had gradually increased, and by its aid he was enabled to see for a considerable distance, yet, though he scanned every tree and every hedgerow, he was unable to catch sight of his foes.

But although they were invisible to him, he might be plainly seen by them, so he resolved without delay to quit his exposed position.

The descent of the hill was quickly made, and then Claude perceived at no very great distance a dark, dense mass of trees, either a park or else, what was more likely, a small wood or coppice.

"That's the place," he ejaculated; "if I can once get beneath the trees unseen all will be well, they may look for me afterwards as long as they think proper."

No. 195.—BLACK BESS.

He at once made his best speed towards this place, and gained it just as a bright red flash in the eastern sky showed the sun was about to rise.

Just before he passed beneath the shadow of the dense mass of trees he looked long and scrutinisingly in the direction he had just come.

Yet, as before, he was unable to see anything of the officers.

"I only trust," he muttered, "that Jack has been as fortunate and has met with as little trouble as I have. If I am not disturbed, this wood will serve most excellently well as a place of concealment till night-fall.

With these words Claude faced about, and rode as far as he could into the little wood.

When, at length, the density of the vegetation prevented any further progress of this kind, he dismounted and led his horse slowly forward.

Having at length penetrated to a sufficient distance, he paused, secured his horse, and sat down to rest.

By instinct he assumed a position of listening, but though he stretched his hearing to the utmost, no alarming sound reached him.

He congratulated himself again and again upon his good luck, and afterwards, feeling oppressed by the intense silence which prevailed in this place, he found himself insensibly sinking off into a slumber.

Fully aware of the great danger there would be of sleeping in such a spot as this, he tried his best to keep himself awake.

With much difficulty he succeeded, but again and again the heavy slumbering feeling would come over him, and in the end, unable to struggle any longer against it, he sank off into a sleep so deep and dreamless as might have been envied by many.

At length, with a shiver and a start, he awoke, and then the first thing he noticed was that the day was rapidly drawing to a close.

When he remembered the length of time he had remained in so helpless a condition he fairly shuddered.

But the next moment his good spirits returned, and he thought only of his good fortune in having escaped so well.

But he now began to be very keenly sensible to the pangs of hunger, and wondered in what way he should be able to satisfy the craving for food.

"I will creep to the edge of this wood," he muttered, "and before night quite closes in will have another good look around me. Then if I see nothing of my foes I will run the risk of making a brief halt at the first inn I can find."

Having come to this decision, Claude lost no time in carrying it out.

He retraced his steps as well as he was able to the very spot where he had first gained entrance to the wood, and stood there for a long time watching earnestly.

In the distance he saw a few farming men walking slowly across the meadows, evidently making their way homeward at the close of their day's labor.

But except these, he was unable to make out any other human beings.

Encouraged by this result, which was almost more than he had dared to hope for, Claude sprang upon the back of his steed and trotted off.

Coming at length to a cross-country road, he determined to pursue its windings, feeling tolerably certain that before he had proceeded any great distance he should arrive at a roadside inn.

Fortune seemed inclined to favor him again, for before he had gone more than a mile he perceived before him just the kind of habitation he wished to gain.

It was a small, rustic, peaceful-looking dwelling, and seemed to have all around it an aspect of shelter and safety.

Perceiving it, Claude quickened his speed, and riding up to the front door he drew rein near the large moss-grown horse-trough, out of which his steed commenced drinking greedily.

"House—house!" he cried. "Now, ostler—quick!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips before he was startled by a tremendous uproar, though coming from within this peaceful building.

He heard loud voices in contention, and the rush of hasty footsteps.

Wondering, but never guessing at the cause of this commotion, Claude sat perfectly still upon his horse.

The front door of the inn was closed, but now it was suddenly dashed open, and, to Claude's intense surprise, out rushed several police officers.

Pistols were in their hands, and they no sooner gained the open air than they discharged them.

But such was their state of excitement and flurry, that not one paused to take aim.

The whole of the weapons were discharged at random.

With a shout of astonishment, Claude Duval put spurs to his horse and galloped off, leaving the police officers in a frantic, excited throng in the middle of the cross-road.

The landlord, and ostler, and other persons who happened to be in the inn at this time were beyond all measure amazed.

"The horses," roared the one in command—"the horses—bring them out! Why, d—n the fellow's impudence!

The idea of riding up to the inn in that fashion! Quick—quick, bring the horses, I say!"

Not finding his requests attended to with sufficient alacrity, he set the example of darting off to the stable and saddling his own steed himself.

CHAPTER CML.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS HIMSELF ENVIRONED BY MANY DIFFICULTIES.

SPEDDY as the officers were in entering the stables and getting their horses ready for the road, yet of necessity some time elapsed, and so by the time they were fairly on the road, Claude Duval had got so good a start that it seemed quite hopeless to attempt the task of overtaking him.

Yet, enraged beyond measure to think that they had missed their man by so narrow a chance, the officers, without pausing to use any reflection whatever, whipped and spurred their already-exhausted animals in a most unmerciful manner.

The fact was, as the reader may surmise, these officers were those who had given chase to Claude Duval at the time when the two highwaymen separated from each other.

They had spent very many hours fruitlessly searching around, and at length, feeling completely tired out themselves, they had determined to rest for a short time at this roadside inn, the only dwelling they had come in sight of for a long time.

Scarcely, however, had they done so than, by a strange fatality, Claude Duval drew up to the front door in the manner we have described.

It was now fairly night, and, though the moon occasionally broke forth from the many clouds that were constantly drifting across the sky, it was very dark, these occasional glimpses of light only serving to make the darkness greater by contrast.

Claude Duval did not gallop far before he felt quite sure that he had nothing particular to fear from those who had so hastily set out in his pursuit.

Their horses were no match in point of speed for his own.

Accordingly, then, in a very short time, he gradually decreased his rate of progress, and began once more to look around him for a place where he could obtain a small supply of food, for the pangs of hunger increased in severity.

He came at length to a small cottage, built near the corner of a lane, and apparently the abode of some poor laboring man.

The stoppage of the horse's feet outside this humble tenement caused those within immediately to approach the door.

It was thrown open, and on the threshold Claude perceived the form of a man and woman, the former carrying a candle, and the countenances of both expressive of a great amount of curiosity.

"I am weary and faint for want of food," said Claude Duval, in a low tone of voice. "Bring me anything you have—no matter how rude the fare may be, it will be welcome; and rest assured you shall be well rewarded for it."

So great was the astonishment and surprise of the cottagers that at first they were unable to reply; but after the lapse of a moment the woman recovered her presence of mind sufficiently to say:

"Well, we are just sitting down to our poor supper, and if you like to dismount and join us—"

"Yes—yes!" said the man, advancing, "and I will take care of your horse."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Claude. "But I cannot dismount, nor can I linger. Bring me something, and I will eat it here."

This request was complied with at once.

The food was rude indeed, and roughly prepared, yet Claude thought that never in all his life had he eaten anything with so much relish.

A draught of weak home-brewed ale washed down this frugal repast.

As he handed back the jug, Claude Duval heard behind him the clatter of horses' feet;

"They have kept well upon my track," he muttered;

"but no matter, I feel more than a match for them now. Hark ye, my friends," he added, in a louder tone, turning to the cottager and his wife, "take my advice: Enter your cottage, shut the door, and if any question is asked of you, say nothing about my presence here to-night. I ask this more for your sake than my own. Can you hear that sound? Hark!"

Filled with amazement, the couple listened, and then replied:

"We do."

"You know what it is?" said Claude, interrogatively.

"Yes, horses' feet."

"Well, then, they are police officers. I am a highwayman! Without knowing who I am, you have given me succour, yet should it be known to these men, that would not make any difference in your favor—you would be liable to imprisonment for having aided and abetted me, therefore say nothing about it, and take that as your reward."

He tossed them a guinea as he spoke, and before the woman had time to stoop down to take up the glittering coin he had disappeared round the corner of the narrow lane which we have mentioned was near the cottage.

Whether these people were prudent enough to take his well-meant advice Claude had no means of knowing, and in a short time, engrossed with his own thoughts, he forgot all about the circumstance.

With low, encouraging cries, he now urged his horse on by the use of the spur.

The end of the lane was quickly reached, and the highwayman found himself once again upon the high-road.

He hesitated a moment as to which way he should turn; but having made up his mind as to whereabouts he was, he turned round sharply to the right, and galloped on.

Soon, however, he heard other sounds mingling with those produced by the beating of his own horse's hoofs upon the hard roadway.

He stopped at once and listened.

Just then the moon again made her appearance between the interstices of a cloud, and, although the light was misty and obscure, yet Claude was able to make out a dark body some distance before him, which he knew well enough to be a troop of police officers.

To turn round and retrace his steps would probably be only to come in contact with those officers who had hung so steadily upon his heels.

He had, therefore, no other resource than to leap the low hedgerow, and take to the open country.

This he did so quickly after having caught sight of the officers in advance, that one would scarcely have thought he had time to hesitate as to his mode of action.

His horse, once more feeling the soft turf beneath his feet, put forth his best powers of speed.

"Confound it!" said Claude, tightening the rein at last, "the whole country seems to be up in arms! Every road appears to have a troop of officers upon it! I must seek shelter somewhere, that's very clear! But Jack? I am forgetting him! How shall we manage to meet again?"

Claude reduced his horse's speed to a walk, for the animal was greatly distressed by the exertion it had been compelled to make.

Claude observed this with regret—he knew how much his own safety depended upon the condition of his steed.

Wishing to give it an opportunity of recovering its wind, he determined to make a halt, being perhaps moved to do so by feeling that rain was beginning to fall, and seeing at no great distance in advance a rude, rambling kind of building that seemed almost like a barn belonging to some farm-house, only this building stood completely by itself, and out of sight of any other.

Towards this Claude Duval directed his horse's steps.

Being at no great distance, it was quickly reached.

The door was swinging half open, so he had no difficulty whatever about making an entrance.

He dismounted and tried to look around him as the interior of this barn, but found it to be well-nigh impossible, owing to the darkness that prevailed.

Through many chinks in the roof, however, the moonbeams found their way, and after a time Claude's eyes became accustomed to the obscurity.

Straw was at hand in abundance, and with some of

this he rubbed his horse down, nor did he pause in this labor until compelled to do so by sheer fatigue.

Going then to the doorway of the barn, he endeavored to take a good look around him.

To be believed, and with good reason, that he had entirely shaken off his pursuers, and now he began to wonder which way he should turn in order to meet with his old comrade.

"Comfortable as these quarters may be," he muttered, at length, "I shall have to leave them, though I would fain remain. Jack may wait about in expectation of meeting me, and so uselessly expose himself to great danger. At all risks, I must endeavour to find him."

With these words he turned back into the barn, and took his steed by the bridle.

He was about to lead him forth and mount, when he fancied a low, murmuring, distant sound reached his ears.

He was all attention immediately, and, once more looking out, he was astonished to perceive quite a dense throng of people approaching.

They were all on foot, and most certainly not police officers, though what they were Claude could not guess.

He observed with some surprise that as they came along they indulged in many wild and furious gestures, and every now and then a cry like one of deep anguish would arise, making itself heard above the humming, murmuring noise which at first attracted the highwayman's notice.

Concealed by the deep shadow of the barn, Claude stood watching them intently as they made their way across the vast meadow.

He could not make up his mind whether to remain where he was until they had passed, or gallop off without taking any notice of them.

Well aware, however, of the importance of keeping unseen as much as possible, he paused, though afterwards he deeply regretted having done so.

To his surprise, the approaching crowd of persons suddenly changed their course, and, from the manner in which they now advanced, no doubt could be entertained that their intention was to make their way direct into the barn.

Discovery now was imminent, for Claude had so many enemies that he could not look upon these new-comers as friends.

To ride forth now unseen by them would be impossible, but yet he thought he might well be able to remain concealed within the building.

A certain amount of curiosity to know who these people were and what was their errand to so strange and lonely a place at that late hour may in no slight degree have influenced Claude in coming to this decision.

At any rate, grasping the reins tightly, he led his horse as silently as possible to the most distant corner of the barn.

Pausing here, he was surprised to find before him a small door leading into another part of the barn which, for some reason or other, had been divided from the rest.

Considering now that he had every chance of remaining securely hidden, Claude congratulated himself upon the decision he had arrived at.

He crossed the threshold quickly, and closed the door.

Fastening it had none, but he groped about until he found a stone lying on the damp flooring, and by means of this he was able to keep the door closed.

By the time he had done this, the murmuring sound had much increased in loudness, for the approaching crowd, quickening their steps, had almost reached the barn.

Claude's only fear was that some movement or noise made by his horse might betray his presence.

In this respect, however, he would have to trust to his good fortune.

Overhead a large patch of the roof had been removed—probably had been blown away by some furious gust of wind, and through the laths by which it was crossed and recrossed there came down a very tolerable amount of light, sufficient to enable him to look around him.

For the present, however, he confined himself to listening.

He had before been struck with the idea that the sounds given forth by these approaching persons were those of

wee, and this idea was confirmed, for sobs and lamentations of sorrow could now plainly be distinguished.

Then suddenly the trampling of footsteps ceased, the outer door of the barn was closed and secured as well as the means at hand would permit.

Then some one uttered a singular word, though what it was Claude could not make out; evidently it was a word belonging to some language of which he was in utter ignorance.

He guessed afterwards that it was a call for light, for in a few moments the other half of the barn where the strangers stood was illuminated.

Claude then noticed for the first time that the wall which divided the barn into two compartments reached up to only a few feet above his head.

Between the top and the roof were many huge time-blackened beams.

However great the highwayman's curiosity might in the first instance have been, it was now very much increased, and upon making this discovery his first idea was that by climbing up he should be enabled to assume such a position that, while being unseen himself, and his presence unsuspected, he should be able to take an accurate observation of everything that took place.

The chief difficulty was to climb up without making any sound that might attract attention.

But, by feeling with his hands, Claude discovered that the wall was rough and crumbling, and presented many places into which he could insert the ends of his fingers and toes.

Drawing himself up at length, he seated himself upon one of the cross-beams, and from this elevated position he found, as he expected, that he commanded a perfect view of the other half of the barn.

He waited a second or two, in order to make sure that the slight noise he could not avoid making had remained unnoticed.

He soon found this was the case, which was not at all surprising, for the whole of these strangers seemed quite intent upon their own affairs.

It was in truth a singular scene of which the highwayman thus unexpectedly found himself a spectator.

By means of several torches, consisting only, so far as he could perceive, of pieces of wood of a resinous quality, all around was plainly revealed.

The garb of these new-comers was without exception, miserably poor, and torn, and ragged.

Members of both sexes were present, some with skins dark and swarthy, others comparatively fair.

But the object that immediately riveted Claude's attention was the bowed, bent form of a very aged man, whose white beard and hair were of so great a length as to conceal a great part of the upper portion of his body.

This old man had been propped up into a tolerably comfortable position upon the straw.

The others all stood around him in various attitudes, all of which, however, were expressive of the utmost grief.

The old man showed little signs of life, except that now and then a kind of shudder seemed to convulse him.

At length he looked up, and the light, falling upon his countenance, enabled Claude to perceive that his features were pinched and shrunken, and carried upon them the impression of extreme age, and beyond all doubt this old man had long outlived the average duration of human life.

Claude began to think that these people were members of a large family of gipsies, and yet, by their attire, they did not seem to be so.

They looked rather like a band of mendicants.

Having raised his head, the old man made several ineffectual attempts to speak.

In a moment a profound silence overspread the group—scarcely a breath could be heard.

"Remember—remember," the old man gasped—"do not forget that I have now no descendant—that it rests upon you before my departure to elect my successor. Fare—"

He strove hard to continue; but after a brief and useless struggle, his gaze fell, and he sank back upon the straw quite dead.

CHAPTER CMLII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AT LENGTH DISCOVERS THE OBJECT OF HIS SEARCH.

At a moment the air was filled with sounds of sorrow coming from the throats of every one of the strange people there present, and the various cries by which grief was expressed were continued for some time without intermission.

Then one advanced from the rest, and going to the old man, placed his hand upon his breast.

There was a deep silence for several seconds.

Then this man, removing his hand, exclaimed:

"There is no longer hope—life has fled!"

Again came the wild burst of sorrow; but this man interrupted it by raising his hand.

He was a young man, tall, well formed, and muscular, and was attired in the garb of a sailor, though Claude's practiced eye detected at once that this dress was nothing more than a disguise.

"You heard his last words," said this young man—"you know what you have to do, and you know what relation I bore to him, and what were his wishes; the rest is left to you."

"We know—we know," was the answer. "You, Bamfylde, shall fill his place—no one is more fitting than you."

At the mention of this name, Claude Duval gave a start of surprise, for it sounded familiarly in his ears.

"Is it agreed," said the young man, who had been called by the strange name Bamfylde—"do you all consent?"

"We do."

There was a flush of triumph in his eyes.

"That is," added one, "as far as we can decide until the full meeting takes place."

"Precisely so."

All present were now quite prepared to look upon this young man as their leader and ruler, and he assumed his position immediately.

Glaucing round him with a keen eye, he detected the small door in the partition wall, through which Claude had passed.

"This is no place for him," said Bamfylde, pointing to the inanimate form of the old man. "Let him be carried in yonder, and left alone for the present, until all necessary things are arranged."

Without the slightest hesitation, this command was obeyed.

The words of an absolute, despotic monarch could not have received a prompter attention.

Claude now saw that his discovery was certain; but the knowledge of this fact did not discompose him in the least.

He had good reasons for believing that this strange and altogether unlooked-for adventure would turn out well for him in the end.

Accordingly, while they were advancing to the door, he dropped down from the beam, and, grasping his horse by the bridle, calmly waited for the new-comers to appear.

When they dashed open the door, and raised their rude torches above their heads in order to look around, they uttered an ejaculation of dismay, not unmingled with rage.

The young man Bamfylde came forward with hurried strides.

"There is no occasion for anger or fear," said Claude. "With your permission, I am willing to become your friend."

Bamfylde advanced, and seizing a torch, held it so that the ruddy light fell full upon Claude's face and form.

He gazed at him for a little while in silence, then he ejaculated:

"I believe you, for your name is—"

Claude raised his hand and checked him.

Bamfylde advanced a few more paces, then placing his mouth close to the highwayman's ear, whispered in faint tones:

"Your name is Claude Duval."

"It is."

"I knew it. Give me your hand. Under all circumstances I will be your friend."

The other persons present looked at this little incident with wondering eyes.

Bamfylde observing this, turned round and addressed a few words to them in that strange language which they had once before employed.

Then bending again towards Claude, he whispered: "Do you know that poor old man we brought hither just in time to die?"

"Know him?" ejaculated Claude, in astonishment!

"Yes; do you not recognise his features?"

"I did not."

"Well—well, he may have been greatly changed by age and other causes, but his name you will recollect at once. That poor wasted body is all that remains of the once famous Bamfylde Moore Carew."

"Can it be possible?" ejaculated Claude, in the utmost amazement. "I thought that he had been dead many, many years ago."

"No," was the answer; "his age is extreme, but he has survived till now."

"And you," said Claude—"you bear the name of Bamfylde—you are a descendant?"

"Yes, his grandson," was the answer. "Many, many times have I heard him speak about the Claude Duval he knew in his young days."

"I have heard," said Claude, "that they had many strange adventures together."

"Yes, many—very many, and the closest friendship and good feeling subsisted between them. As we are their descendants, let the bond of union be preserved."

"With all my heart!"

"It must some day stand you in good stead," returned Bamfylde, "for our fraternity grows every day more powerful, and I will make you acquainted with a sign known only to the initiated, which will enable you at all times to claim the aid and protection of any of the band."

"That would be a useful service, truly," said Claude, "for I have few friends."

"Look!" and, as the young man spoke, he made a strange sign upon his breast, which Claude, after several attempts, succeeded in imitating.

"There," he said, "that will do. You have only to remember and make that sign, and you may command them to the death!"

A loud shout of welcome arose from those assembled, then one and all pressed round, offering assurances of their friendship.

Bamfylde was eager for the highwayman to remain with them for some time; but Claude declined, alleging as his reason for doing so the necessity he was under of looking for his comrade.

Tossing his purse to this strange people, he said farewell to their leader, and departed.

"It may be," he muttered, as he rode away, "that some time or other I shall have occasion to feel rejoiced at this chance incident. It may turn out to the benefit of us all."

Although immersed in these reflections, Claude did not forget his caution, and continually looked around him, to make sure that no officers were near.

At length, gaining an elevated piece of ground, he paused to take as accurate a survey of his position as was possible.

At last he determined upon the direction to take that would be most likely to enable him to meet his companion, and, having chosen his course, he set forward at a much more rapid pace than he had hitherto made use of.

After more than half an hour's riding, the high-road was gained.

Here he waited for some time, listening; but, hearing no sound, he rode gently along it, looking out on every side for some indication of the presence of Sixteen-String Jack.

He looked in vain, however, and continued to look for a long while, for when morning dawned it found him still at his task.

The most serious fears now began to press upon his mind.

He knew there would be some difficulty in meeting with each other, as no precise place was agreed upon; but yet he could not help feeling the conviction that

had his comrade escaped as well as himself, he should ere this have seen something of him.

The morning broke cold and chill, and over all the meadows hung a dense white vapour, thus making it impossible to see for any great distance.

When the sun rose, however, this vapour was by degrees chased away.

So soon as ever the atmosphere was clear, Claude once more paused to look around him.

Just then he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and turning sharply round, saw his comrade approaching him.

The next moment their hands were firmly grasped, for Sixteen-String Jack had been not less full of anxiety than his comrade.

"You wonder doubtless where it was I sprang from so suddenly," said Sixteen-String Jack, with a laugh, "but the fact is, I heard some one approaching, and not knowing that it was you, took the precaution to conceal myself behind yonder bushes. As soon as I recognised you I rode forth."

"And how have you fared?" said Claude.

"Oh, excellently! I have had scarcely any trouble. Over yonder is a little inn far removed from all other dwellings, and around which there is always a perpetual calmness. There I remained the greater portion of the time, and there, if you are willing, we will conceal ourselves during the day."

Sixteen-String Jack pointed across the country with his whip while he spoke, in order to indicate the position of the inn he had just mentioned.

"Are you sure it will be safe?" said Claude.

"Well, as safe as anywhere," was the reply. "But come; at all events, we will ride in that direction, and while doing so I will tell you all that has happened to me; it will be comprised in a few words."

"Do so," said Claude; "I am full of curiosity."

"And afterwards," said Jack, "you shall tell me your adventures, for I fancy by your way you have something of far more importance to communicate."

"Well, that may be; but begin."

"Well, then," said Jack, "by pressing my horse hard I got away from the police officers without much trouble; nevertheless, I did not bate my speed, but kept pushing on in the direction that we had agreed upon."

Claude nodded.

"It was soon after sunrise that I found myself in front of the inn I have already spoken of. The aspect of the place took my fancy at once, and as my horse was exhausted, I was certain I could not do better than halt there, if only for a short time, and while doing so keep a good look-out for the officers."

"And is it possible," said Claude, "that you were so fortunate as to remain there unmolested?"

"Not only possible," said Jack, "but true. My horse was comfortably placed in the stable, and as the hours slipped by without bringing me a sight of the officers, I came to the conclusion they had abandoned the pursuit altogether."

"And the landlord of this place?" said Claude.

"There is none."

"Landlady, then?"

"Yes, she's a widow, and lives there a solitary life. I suppose you were about to ask me whether I thought she had any suspicions?"

"Just so."

"Well, I don't believe for a moment that she has. Customers are so rare at that out-of-the-way-place that she scarcely knows how to show them enough attention."

"I like your description of the place well enough," said Claude, "and I believe that the best thing we can do is to take refuge there."

"Decidedly."

"Let me tell you," continued Claude, "that all the roads that I have been upon to-night have been patrolled by officers. I have scarcely been able to ride a mile without seeing them."

"I have found much the same thing," said Jack, "while watching for you, and I began to fear that they had succeeded in capturing you."

"No—no, I was safe enough."

"Well, then," said Jack, "push on at a more rapid rate; the sun is rising, and soon many people will be abroad."

We cannot do better than keep out of sight as much as possible."

"How far is this inn?"

"A quarter of an hour's gallop will take us there with ease."

"Lead the way, then," was the response. "Rest assured I shall not be far behind you."

Sixteen-String Jack needed no second bidding—he was, in truth, most anxious to return to the place of concealment which had served him so well.

In something less than the time he had mentioned, the front of the inn was reached, and on observing the situation, Claude exclaimed:

"This is, in truth, the most out-of-the-way nook I have seen for many a day! I am glad you persuaded me to come, for I am almost worn out with fatigue."

Sixteen-String Jack had prepared the landlady of the inn for the appearance of a companion, and she now came forth in a most obsequious manner.

"No ostler is kept here," said Jack. "We must see to our own horses—that is something you will not mind any more than myself."

"Certainly not," said Claude, as he dismounted—"in fact, I rather prefer it than otherwise."

The landlady stared a little at this remark, and Claude felt that he had been rather imprudent in making it.

However, he trusted that it would pass off unnoticed.

Jack led the way to the shed, which, for his own convenience, had been turned into a stable.

Here they attended to their horses, making them as comfortable as possible, and at the same time merely removing the bits from their mouths, and loosening the girths of the saddles, so that they might be got ready for the road at a moment's notice.

Claude Duval, however, could not make himself quite at ease in his new quarters, though Jack set him the example of doing so.

Some time was whiled away by the relation of the events which had happened since their parting.

Then, with anxious faces, they began to speak of the probable position of their companions.

As the hours passed on without anything occurring to disturb the intense quiet that prevailed around the inn, Claude gave way to its influence and slept, Sixteen-String Jack in the meanwhile promising to keep guard.

In this way, alternately watching and sleeping, the time passed, until once more the welcome shades of evening began to creep over the earth.

"So soon as ever it is fairly dusk," said Claude, "we will depart. I cannot make myself content to remain here any longer; the chances of detection are too great."

"I differ from you," said Jack. "I consider we are lucky in having fallen into such comfortable quarters. You know how closely all the roads are watched; if we venture forth to-night we must of necessity encounter the police officers."

"It may be so," said Claude, "but I have an idea that we shall be best abroad."

"Well, then, I am willing to fall in with your views. It is dark enough now, if you are so anxious to depart."

"I am then," said Claude, "though why I can scarcely tell you."

With these words, he rose from his seat and made his way to the stables.

Jack remained behind to settle with the landlady, and his pay was so liberal and so far beyond her expectations that the good woman could not express her thanks, but only stared with astonishment.

In five minutes afterwards the highwaymen had left the premises.

Crossing an open piece of land in front of the inn, they immediately plunged among some bushes, which offered them partial concealment.

Before going many paces, Claude exclaimed:

"Down—down, Jack! If you stoop down we shall, ten to one, remain unseen! I can hear horsemen approaching!"

Jack heard them too, and so dismounted without another word.

The bushes then tolerably well concealed their forms and those of their horses.

Raising their heads a little, they were able to command a view of the inn and of much of the flat country around it.

All at once, Jack uttered a faint ejaculation:

"See," he said, "yonder are officers!"

"Yes," returned Claude, in a whisper, "I see them; and I think we have taken our departure just in time."

"So think I. It is in truth a narrow escape. Let us be moving."

"No," said Claude; "wait a moment—we will watch their movements."

A rather large body of police officers now came fully into sight, and it seemed that as soon as they perceived the inn they turned their horses' heads towards it.

The highwaymen continued to watch them until they pulled up in front of the door.

"Now, then," said Claude, "let us be off. Our friend, the landlady, will be able to tell them enough to put them on our track; and Jack, my friend, just congratulate yourself on my uneasiness. If we had remained, as you proposed, we should by this time be in a most awkward fix."

"You are right," said Jack, as he sprang into the saddle—"quite right. And unless great good fortune attends us, you will find that we shall have some trouble yet."

CHAPTER CMLIII.

IN WHICH SOME CONFIRMATION IS GIVEN TO CLAUDE'S STORY.

ALMOST before a dozen words had been exchanged between the police officers and the landlady of the inn, the former discovered that they had by great good fortune got upon the right scent at last.

Trembling with fear, for she knew not how serious the consequences might be to herself—and the officers did not forget to threaten—the landlady pointed across the piece of waste land, in the direction the two highwaymen had so lately taken.

The officers eagerly followed the direction of her finger, and the next moment a cry burst simultaneously from their lips.

"There they are," they shouted—"there they go! Now, my lads, spur hard, we have but to keep them in sight until we are joined by the rest of our party!"

The officers gave a loud cheer, for they were one and all inspired by the prospect of overtaking the fugitives.

At this time the moon was shining, and with some amount of distinctness, and at no great distance, flitting over the fields like shadows, they could perceive the forms of the flying highwaymen.

"Push on, Claude," said Jack—"a sharp touch is the best; it will be useless to think of tiring them out; let us get out of sight as quickly as we can."

Claude made no other reply save that of burying his spurs deeply in his horse's flanks, thus accelerating the already frightful pace at which they were going.

"Keep to it, Claude," said Jack, after they had gone a considerable distance, "we get further and further from them every moment. Try to keep up your present rate, and we shall soon be out of all danger."

Claude wanted no urging upon this point; he was to the full as anxious as his companion, and moreover, he was filled with the apprehension that ere long they would come full tilt against some other party.

This, indeed, was their chief danger, but they knew it, and kept a sharp-look out in advance accordingly.

By gradual, yet perceptible degrees, the police officers dropped still further and further in the rear.

Their mortification was excessive, but there was no help for it, their horses could not compete in speed with those possessed by the highwaymen, and what was more, not one had fully mastered the art of riding.

It was this which so very often gave the highwaymen the advantage over their pursuers.

"I think we may venture to take it easy now," said Claude; "to gallop up this hill will only distress our horses needlessly."

"You are right," said Jack; "we have little to fear from our foes at the present time, and when we gain the

summit of yonder hill, I should not be surprised to find them out of sight."

"Let us hope so, at all events."

At a gentle walk the two highwaymen permitted their horses to leave the steep hill that lay before them.

The poor beasts panted for breath, and the violence of their exertions had covered them with foam from head to foot.

"Jack," said Claude, after a brief pause, "it seems to me quite certain that it will never do for us to continue riding over the country in this manner."

"But how is it to be avoided?"

"Why, by finding some remote or inaccessible place where we can remain quiet until the nine days have expired. While we are thus hunted from place to place, and occasionally kept in sight, the officers will indulge in the hope of eventually capturing us."

"That's true enough," said Jack, "and if we can only hide somewhere, they will soon grow tired of riding about to no object."

"Precisely; and that is why I think we ought to turn our attention to discovering some place that will answer our purpose."

"Yes, that's all very well," said Jack, "but the difficulty is where to find it."

"Can you suggest anywhere?"

"Not at the moment, I can't. You see the worst of it is, the officers pop up everywhere, and in places where you least expect them—at that inn, for example."

Claude laughed.

"You were over confident of your safety there, Jack. But let us keep our object steadily before us. I have been thinking during the past few moments that there is, or was years ago, some miles from here, an old castle, or rather the ruins of one."

"Indeed!" said Jack. "Where?"

"Not far from a small village called Nealham."

"Nealham—Nealham?" repeated Jack. "I fancy I have heard the name before, yet cannot recollect it."

"It is very likely," said Claude. "Many, many years have elapsed since I saw the place, but I remember thinking at the time how well-suited it was for the purpose which we now require."

"How far should you think it is?"

"Not more than an hour's good ride, and I believe that if we could only be so fortunate as to gain the shelter of its crumbling walls unseen, we might make certain of remaining there in safety and unsuspected for a much longer period than that which we have to look forward to."

"I like the idea," said Jack, "and certainly cannot suggest anything better. But stay—as the summit of the hill is reached let us pause and look back."

The highwaymen did so; but at the time the moon, being hidden by clouds, prevented them from seeing to any great distance.

"I cannot perceive them," said Jack.

"Nor hear them," added Claude. "Come on, Jack—don't linger. The moon will soon break forth again, and when it does we are much more likely to be seen up here, than the officers are below."

"You are right; and so, without any more discussion, turn your horse's head in the direction of the ruined castle you speak of; when we see it we shall be better able to come to a conclusion concerning it."

"It may have greatly changed since I saw it last," said Claude; "but that is a point only to be ascertained by actual inspection. But we need not go so fast as to distress our horses, nor to prevent our conversation."

To this his comrade assented, and at an easy trot, which, without greatly fatiguing the horses, yet which got over the ground in very good style, they made their way in an oblique line across the country.

The clatter of their horses' hoofs, however, and the rapidity of their motion proved a great hindrance to speaking, and so before very long perfect silence reigned between them.

But although they spoke not, their thoughts were busy; for whenever they turned their attention to the probable position of their companions they had ample food for conjecture.

As they journeyed on, the clouds to a very great extent dispersed, leaving the sky clear.

Claude Duval was the first to break the silence which had been for so long maintained.

"Look, Jack!" he exclaimed, slightly reining-in his steed, and pointing with his whip—"do you see yonder, in the distance, something dim and shadowy, on which the moon is shining?"

Jack strained his eyes to the utmost.

"I think I do see a something," he replied, "but I scarcely know what."

"You see the ruins of the castle I spoke of," responded Claude. "In a few moments you will be able to perceive them with much greater plainness."

This quickly proved to be the case, and Sixteen-String Jack looked with a very great amount of interest upon the scene that lay before them.

"There lies the village some distance to the right," exclaimed Claude, "and that's why I am approaching the castle in this direction; I think we have all the better chance of reaching it unseen."

Jack nodded, but made no other reply, the fact being that his attention was wholly taken up by what he saw.

Certainly, the ivy-grown walls had a most striking appearance.

"I see scarcely any alteration at present," was Claude's next remark. "I could imagine that only a few hours had elapsed since I saw it last, so little change has taken place. But let us wait here under the shadow of these trees for a few moments. Do you see yonder cloud which is hurrying up? In a short time the moon will be covered by it, and then we shall be almost certain of gaining the interior of the ruins unperceived."

Jack paused at once.

His eyes happened to be fixed upon the large black cloud at the moment when Claude spoke, and some similar idea had suggested itself to his mind.

They had not long to wait.

In a few moments the light of the moon was entirely obscured, and what might be termed double darkness prevailed, for so it appeared in this sudden withdrawal of light.

"Now, then, forward!" exclaimed Claude. "Follow slowly and carefully in my footsteps, for the ground hereabout is rugged, and in many parts there are deep places, into which a fall would be unpleasant."

Sixteen-String Jack at once dropped into the rear, and Claude Duval took his way onwards with a great amount of confidence, considering the nature of the ground and the length of time that had elapsed since his last visit to this spot.

Soon after, and without any accident, the interior of the ruins was gained.

Claude led the way across the dismantled court-yard, and through a low-arched doorway, into what had evidently been at some time or other a chapel connected with the edifice.

Walls surrounded it; but there was no roof, and on the ground grass was growing thickly.

"This will do excellently well, both for ourselves and for our horses," was Claude's first remark. "If we can contrive to keep them near all will be well; and while we keep within these walls there will be little fear we shall be seen."

"How intense the silence is!" said Jack. "You could almost imagine it a city of the dead."

"Yes, so you might. I did not tell you, I think, the reason why this place is left so much deserted?"

"No, you did not."

"Because of the strange stories current respecting it. You are not afraid of ghosts, I suppose, neither am I, but the inhabitants of this district are, and so the place is shunned by all—not from one year's end to another does a human foot penetrate these ruins."

"It seems so," said Jack, glancing around him with scarcely comfortable feelings. "I never before witnessed such complete desolation."

"It is desolate," said Claude, "and we ought to rejoice at it. At any rate, while we are here, should anyone be foolhardy enough to approach, I will undertake to give him such a fright that he will never venture here again!"

"But what's the story, Claude?" said Jack, following Claude's example by sitting down on a fragment of fallen masonry.

"I don't know the legend," was the answer; "but I have been told that strange sounds have been heard, lights seen in the night, and once, many years ago, a stranger, who had boldness enough to approach the ruins after nightfall, averred that he saw a form resembling that of a monk. He described very accurately the long gray cloak, and afterwards affirmed that he had seen the monk's face, or as much of it as was visible, for the lower half was entirely covered by silvery hair that reached down almost to his waist."

"And I suppose," said Jack, "people were sufficiently terrified at this to feel afraid of coming any more?"

"I suppose so; but no doubt it was all imagination, or else a freak played by some one upon the traveller. Still," he added, "the place is large enough, and if there are ghosts there ought to be room for them here as well as for us."

By the light manner in which Claude Duval spoke, it was evident that he placed but a very small amount of credence in the story he had just related.

Not so Jack, however, who recollected with a very peculiar shuddering sensation the strange events which had happened to himself at the Three Spiders Inn, and recalled, with anything but comfortable feelings, the sequel to them.

He marvelled much that Claude made no allusion to these circumstances; he could only account for it by supposing that they had slipped his memory, and such being the case, he thought it not worth while to revive so disagreeable a subject.

"Well, now, Jack," said Claude, after a pause, "tell me what you think of this place; is it not likely that we shall be able to remain here concealed for the length of time agreed upon?"

"I think there is a strong probability of it; and at any rate, no one could approach us very closely without our knowledge, and one great advantage about the nature of the building is, that we could easily make our way out at any point."

"You are right," said Claude, "but it is very strange to me if we are troubled by the coming of anyone."

While he spoke, Claude took from his pocket one of his pistols, and in a very leisurely, business-like way began to take it to pieces for the purpose of giving it a thorough cleaning.

While thus engaged, the two highwaymen held a consultation as to their future movements, and it was then fully determined that unless something unexpected took place that they would remain in the shelter of the ruins till the time came for them to set out for Hampton.

The intense silence that prevailed in the ruins had a most chilling and depressing influence upon Jack.

In vain he tried to struggle against it, and to turn his thoughts into some other channel; if he succeeded for a few moments his mind was sure to dwell upon the original subject.

And now once more the moon broke forth from behind the clouds, and shed her silvery lustre upon the time-worn walls.

By this time Claude had carefully loaded his pistol and placed it ready for immediate use, and no sooner did he perceive that the moonbeams were pouring down with full force than he started up and exclaimed:

"Come, Jack, now that it is a little lighter, follow me, and we will make as good an examination as we can of our new quarters."

Jack rose slowly and quietly.

His comrade noticed his manner in a moment, and exclaimed, with a slight laugh:

"Why, Jack, one would think you were no better than the rest—that you were frightened at the thought of some spectre making its appearance."

"No, no—not exactly that," said Jack. "But why not change the subject?"

"Just as you like. But come—look first, and tell me whether you ever saw anything more beautiful?"

Claude pointed to the large courtyard, which was now fully lighted up in every part by the moon's rays.

"It is truly beautiful," said Jack; "but—but—"

"But what? Why do you hesitate?"

"I was thinking that those stones yonder resemble a hard more than ought else."

"Nonsense, Jack," laughed Claude—"you really get worse!"

"Perhaps so, and I may as well confess at once that I cannot prevent my thoughts from dwelling upon that strange circumstance that occurred a short time back—I mean when we saw the shadow on the wall."

"Sensibly, Sixteen-String Jack sank his voice while he spoke."

The words no sooner reached Claude Duval's ears than he gave a slight start.

"Was it so?" he said, endeavouring to appear composed. "I had quite forgotten all about it. Confound it, man! why did you mention such a thing as that at the present time?"

"Hark!" said Jack. "What's that?"

The faint but clear sounds of a clock striking the hour, floating through the silent air, came gently to their ears.

Jack counted the strokes half aloud.

"It's the church in the next village," exclaimed Claude. "How strange that we should hear it so far off!"

"And midnight," said Jack.

"Yes, the hour when—"

He paused abruptly, for Sixteen-String Jack just then grasped him by the arm with painful tightness.

At the same instant he raised his other hand and pointed to the extremity of the courtyard.

"Look—look!" he gasped. "What do you see there? You see, the story you were telling me has some truth in it after all."

Claude tried hard to preserve his usual calmness, but, for all that, his cheeks grew white and his form quivered.

Clearly, distinctly and fully revealed by the moonbeams, he saw on the other side of the courtyard a dark, shadowy form, yet one whose outlines were well defined.

The figure was one wrapped in a long gray cloak, the cowl of which was drawn forwards to its full extent.

Then, while they gazed, the figure paused, the cowl was thrown back, and they saw a thin and wasted countenance, with a huge white beard descending in heavy, wavy masses.

The highwaymen both gazed until their eyes ached; then, unable to look longer, they averted their eyes.

When they recovered themselves sufficiently to look around again, they saw at a glance that the figure had disappeared.

CHAPTER CMLIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL EXPLORE THE RUINS OF THE OLD CASTLE.

UPON making this discovery, neither spoke.

Sixteen-String Jack gave one glance at his old comrade; then, walking back with an unsteady step, re-seated himself upon the piece of stone-work, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"This is too much," he murmured—"too much! Claude, let us depart at once."

"You seem strongly overcome, Jack," answered his comrade. "Shake off these superstitious errors—be more like yourself."

Sixteen-String Jack only shook his head slowly.

"I can't forget," he said, "what I have seen. Explain that if you can, then I shall be more composed."

"To what do you refer?"

"The shadow that we all saw upon the wall."

"Bah! why not forget that incident, and think about the present? For my own part, I am glad rather than otherwise that we have received this confirmation of the truth of the old legend."

"Glad!" ejaculated Jack, in wonder.

"Yes—because it is very strange to me if that figure, whatever it is, goes out of its way to harm us; and while it remains, do you not see that it will be a most effectual protection to us by scaring away all other people."

"But how dreadful to remain," said Jack—"to know that—"

"Be silent and listen. I looked well at that strange figure, and I must say that never in my life did I see anything that looked more substantial or real."

"Do you think, then, that the—"

"I think it was no spectre," answered Claude, "but a man."

"Then say that, but you do not mean it; you think by



[SIX POLICE OFFICERS MAKE TOM KING A FAST PRISONER.]

making this statement that you will reconcile me to remaining here."

"Not I. I speak what I believe."

"How was it, then, that the figure appeared and disappeared so rapidly and mysteriously?"

"That we have to find out. Unfortunately, it seems we both averted our eyes at the same moment, and while we did so there was ample time for anyone to get out of the way."

"But should it be a live man, what object could he have in keeping up such a mummery as this?"

"Ah! there, now, you put a question to me I am no better able to answer than yourself. Yet how easy to suppose that some one may, like ourselves, be anxious for remaining in concealment, and if so, what is more natural than to adopt the dress described to be worn by the ghost, and imitate the movements of a spectre as closely as possible?"

No. 197.—BLACK BIRD.

"That might be," said Jack, after a momentary silence, "but still—"

"You don't think it," interrupted Claude. "That's what you mean by your hesitation. Well, time will prove. If you take my advice we shall remain here in our present quarters, and the task of probing this mystery to the bottom will find us with an occupation."

After that, Sixteen-String Jack was silent.

It was clear he by no means relished the proposition of his comrade, yet he did not like to confess as much, and when we come to remember the strange circumstances under which the shadow first presented itself to him, we shall not be surprised that he should suffer on this occasion an extraordinary amount of agitation.

"Look here, Jack," said Claude, "we will give up our idea of roaming about the ruins to-night. I can tell you want a little calm, peaceful slumber if you can have it. The difference it will make to you will be surprising."

Take my advice; throw down your cloak in yonder corner, wrap it round you and go to sleep. In the meanwhile I will sit here and keep watch, and while I do so, nothing mortal or ghostly shall approach to do you harm."

"No—no, Claude, I cannot sleep."

"Well, try, and after you have done so, I will take your place and you can have mine. By this means we shall surely obtain safety."

After some little persuasion Sixteen-String Jack complied with his companion's wishes, but although he threw himself down in the darkest corner and covered himself with his cloak, his eyes refused to close in sleep.

At length, however, fatigue and silence combined to bring a drowsy feeling over him.

Claude called to him in a faint tone of voice, and finding he received no reply, concluded rightly that Jack slept.

The temptation came very strongly over Claude to leave his comrade where he was and take a ramble through the ruins alone.

But he remembered the assurance he had given, and determined to be as good as his word.

The time passed wearily and slowly away, for he had nothing to occupy him save his thoughts, and he experienced no little difficulty in keeping himself awake.

Jack slept during the remainder of the night, nor did he awake until the sun had fairly risen.

He started up and glanced around him in confused bewilderment, when his eyes lighted upon Claude, who looked pale and worn out with watching.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he asked; "you look quite scared."

"I have been dreaming, and the vision was so vivid that I could scarcely persuade myself it was not reality."

"Do not trouble yourself to tell it," said Claude, rising.

"I have managed to keep my eyes open till the present moment, but now they must close, and when they do, let me ask you not to wake me up unless something important takes place."

Jack readily gave this assurance, and in a few minutes Claude Duval was quite insensible to all around him.

Sixteen-String Jack was much refreshed, and he looked around him at the crumbling walls with very different feelings to those he had experienced on the night before.

Yet still, when he recollected what he had seen, his feelings were far from comfortable.

Claude slept till long past noon, and his first question on awaking was whether Jack had heard or seen anything.

"Nothing whatever," was the answer—"the silence is as profound now as it was at midnight."

"That goes to show we are alone. Then, Jack, my friend, I feel more and more convinced that we have come to the right place at last. The officers will never think of looking for us here."

"I hope not. But would there be any risk in taking a good look around us?"

"I think not," said Claude. "I was about to propose a ramble. If we are careful we can keep well under cover of the walls, and so be in no fear that we shall be seen. Come this way."

With these words the highwaymen quitted the ruined chapel and occupied themselves for a long time in wandering about the remains of the castle, and making themselves acquainted with its position.

In doing this they saw no signs or token that pointed to the fact that any human beings save themselves had trodden on this ground for years and years.

From time to time they peeped forth from various chinks and crevices, and every time saw nothing but the fair, open country.

At last they reached the keep or this old structure, and, doubtless from the fact that it was more strongly built than the remainder, it had withstood more successfully the ravages of time.

An iron-bound, heavy oaken door was swinging upon its hinges, and beyond this they perceived the commencement of a flight of spiral steps.

"Let us go this way," said Claude. "If we can manage to reach the top of the keep, so much the better; we can crouch down so as to be out of sight; and think what a glorious view of the surrounding country we shall have!

We can here have ample warning of the approach of a friend or foe."

"Let us try the ascent, then."

"With all my heart!"

This was enough for Claude.

He sprang forward and commenced ascending the steps rapidly.

In many places they were broken, and everywhere slippery and treacherous to the feet.

As they ascended small fragments of masonry were perpetually dislodged, causing them no little apprehension.

In the end the summit of the keep was reached, and at the first glance they took around, neither of the highwaymen could repress ejaculations of delight.

In good truth the scene was a most charming one, such as would have well repaid anyone to have travelled miles to look upon.

Remembering their danger, however, the highwaymen set to work to scan every bit of country attentively.

While so engaged they did not speak, but when at last they had travelled round in a complete circle, Claude observed:

"There's nothing to fear at present, Jack—I'll be sworn no police officers are anywhere near us."

"Yes, I think we may safely assert that."

"Well, is not this the right place to stay in for a time?" asked Claude, somewhat triumphantly. "Why, if we choose to keep this elevated station we shall have timely information of anyone's approach."

"Yes, it's all very well," said Jack, "but yet I can see one objection to it—one difficulty in the way."

"What is it?"

"Why, just at the present time I am most forcibly reminded that a long while has elapsed since I tasted food. Can you tell me how we are to obtain it in this lonely place?"

Claude Duval rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I have not thought much about it," he added, "and yet it seems to me the difficulty is one easily to be got over."

"How so?"

"Why, look! Yonder lies the village, and beyond all doubt there's an alchouse in it."

"Well?"

"It is well," said Claude, "for when night comes we can wrap ourselves in our cloaks, set out on foot, and walk to the village. We shall pass easily as travellers, and at the alchouse we shall be able to get a substantial meal."

"But there's the danger of detection," said Jack.

"Of course there is, and so there will be everywhere."

"And then what should you do on the next occasion?"

"There—there," said Claude, with a laugh, "you ought to know by this time it is perfectly foolish for us to arrange what we shall do at any future time. Let us be content with the present."

Sixteen-String Jack was thus silenced, for he was unable to think of any better plan of operations.

With great anxiety and impatience, however, he watched the decline of day.

He longed most ardently for night to come.

At length, when dusk began to creep over the meadows, they descended from the keep, and, having secured their horses in such a manner that there was no fear they would stray away, the two highwaymen, enveloping themselves in their cloaks, set out at a sharp pace to the village.

Before quitting the ruins, they were most careful to ascertain that no one was in sight who might observe them, then they made their way to the point they wished to reach by the most devious and circuitous route they could think of.

It was getting very late when they entered the long, straggling High Street of the village, and, ere they had gone many paces, they perceived a large, substantial-looking inn, with a huge swinging sign in front of it.

"That's the place," said Claude. "How cheerful and comfortable it looks. If we can only manage to keep quiet there, I shall be in no hurry to take my departure."

"Nor I either."

No more was said until the front of the inn was fairly reached, then they paused a moment, for the sound

of some one singing in a most uproarious voice came upon their ears.

A blind of many colours had been drawn down over the window, yet so carelessly as to leave a place through which the highwaymen could peep and take a glance at the interior.

They saw rather a large, comfortable-looking room, with a huge fire burning on the hearth, the flames of which shot up to a tremendous height, and lighted up the room with a pleasant, cheerful glow.

This was, indeed, the only kind of illumination but it was amply sufficient for those who were present.

Seated around were several persons, who, by their appearance, evidently were inhabitants of the village or the surrounding parts.

"That looks cheerful and welcome, does it not, Claude?" whispered Jack.

"Yes, very. Let us enter—I feel unwilling to remain in the cold a moment longer."

"But shall we go in there, or ask for a private room?"

"Whichever you like."

"Nay, which would be best?"

"Well, I am for entering and making one of this good company. We shall be stared at when we first enter, beyond a doubt. But we shall be able to find some shady corner, as there is no other light than comes from the fire, and after a time we shall be unnoticed."

"And be able to hear all that goes on as well."

"Yes, certainly. That may be an advantage. Let us enter."

With these words, the highwaymen drew their hats down over their foreheads, and pushed open the front door.

They had no difficulty in finding their way to the room they had taken a peep into the interior of.

A burly-looking man was in the midst of one of those long old country ditties.

He did not stop when the two strangers entered, and so they were enabled to sit down in the corner near the chimney without attracting very much notice or remark, though searching glances were cast upon them by many.

At the conclusion of the song, the landlord entered.

"A cold night, gentlemen," he said, addressing our friends—"such a night as makes a seat by the fire-side most welcome."

"You are right," replied Claude, "and therefore we have entered to partake of such hospitality as you may offer."

"You can have anything you like to ask for, gentlemen," was the reply, "and that of the best."

The order was given, and very soon a most tempting-looking repast was laid before the two highwaymen, who did it ample justice, listening all the while to the conversation of those around.

In this, however, they found little to interest them—the subjects were those which, for the most part, they were unfamiliar with.

During a brief silence that all at once came upon the assembly, a sound was heard betokening the arrival of another traveller.

One and all turned their eyes towards the door, which soon after was pushed open, and a tall, military-looking man, wrapped in a cloak, made his appearance.

"Good evening, friends," he said, with a slight inclination of his head. "I am chilled to the bone, and greatly fatigued. Perhaps you would allow me a seat in front of the fire."

One was immediately offered him.

He sat down, and stretched out his feet towards the blaze.

"It's a bitter cold night," he said, "or else I feel it more severely than usual. I've been used to rough weather, too, in my time."

A glance at his countenance, now plainly revealed by the ruddy beams of the fire, would have been ample warrant for this assertion.

Apparently he had ordered brandy of the landlord before he entered, for just then that individual came in, bearing a tray before him.

"Mix it, landlord," he said—"plenty of sugar, and don't be too liberal with the water; and while you are doing so, just tell me what confounded place you call that over yonder."

"Which place?" asked the landlord, in some surprise.

"Why, those ruins."

"Oh, of the old castle!"

"Yes, now you come to speak, no doubt it is the remains of a castle."

At those words, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude could not help exchanging glances.

Nevertheless, the next moment they assumed as much indifference as they were able, while, in reality, they waited with breathless eagerness for the next words that might pass the stranger's lips.

"Well, does anyone live there?" he inquired.

"Live there?" ejaculated the landlord. "Heaven forbid! No one would dream of such a thing!"

"Then how was it that I saw a light there a short time since?"

"A light!" was echoed simultaneously by every voice.

"Yes, certainly! But bless me, what's the matter? Why, you all look scared to death!"

The landlord handed his guest the brandy-and-water while he exclaimed, in a trembling voice:

"You don't mean to tell us, sir, that you have seen a light among the old ruins to-night?"

"I most certainly have. The fact is, I lost my way among those confounded winding lanes that you have got in this part of the country, and as I seemed to be doing nothing else but bend round about first one way and then another, I resolved to take a short cut across the meadows, in the hope of finding some place of shelter."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, I thought it was well indeed, for in a short time I caught sight in the distance of a faint glimmering light, such as might proceed at the present time from your window. I galloped towards it, and at length found myself close to a ruined wall."

There was a breathless silence while the stranger went on.

"Then, to my intense annoyance, the light suddenly disappeared. I looked around, but could not see it, and the place certainly appeared as though it had not been visited by anyone for years."

"Directly afterwards I heard a laugh—a wild, mocking laugh—which echoed and re-echoed among the ruins to such a degree that I could not for the life of me make out from whence the sounds at first proceeded. I searched hastily, but without result, then, feeling far from comfortable, I turned my horse's head in the direction of this village. Now, Mr. Landlord, don't look so terrified, man—just tell me the meaning of what I have seen and heard."

The landlord shook his head to and fro several times, and waited so long before he began to make his reply that the stranger fairly lost his patience.

"Sir," he said, at last, "be thankful—be rejoiced that you have escaped to tell this tale!"

"Escaped?" exclaimed the stranger. "I had no difficulty whatever."

"It seems incredible," said the landlord—"quite incredible. But let me tell you that for hundreds of years that ruined castle has been haunted by a spectre!"

"Bah!" said the stranger, contemptuously.

"Strange sights have been seen ere now, such as lights flitting to and fro, strange noises heard, as of rumbling thunder underground. There are some who have described how they have seen the spectre. For those there was no hope."

"What do you mean," exclaimed the stranger, half angrily—"what do you mean? Why do you not speak out fairly and clearly, not keep alluding to things in that fashion?"

"If you will listen," said the landlord "I will tell you all."

CHAPTER CMLV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

CLAUDE DUVAL and Sixteen-String Jack were beyond all doubt more deeply interested in this little episode than any other persons present.

The first thing they did was to congratulate themselves

upon having been so fortunate as to quit the ruins at the time they had; otherwise, had they lingered, there was a strong probability that they would have been discovered by this military-looking stranger, who by his manner, seemed quite insensible to fear.

But especially Claude waited with impatience and anxiety for the landlord to commence his story, for he hoped, by paying great attention to its details, to be able to turn it to good account.

Our two friends and the stranger were the only three persons in the room unacquainted with the legend connected with the ruined castle, and yet, so great a fascination was there in the theme that the others, knowing every word that was about to come, sat still, and prepared to listen as though it was something new.

"You must know, then," the landlord began, "that a great many years ago that castle was in a perfect state of repair, and tenanted by a powerful lord, the last of his race—a proud, passionate, vindictive man. For some offence or other—I know not what, for it has been variously stated—this proud lord slew the father confessor of the castle. You doubtless know, without me telling you, what was thought in those days of such a crime as this.

"The dying monk with his last breath cursed the hand that had laid him low, and prophesied that, ere many years rolled by, that proud castle should be a ruin, and that the owner should be mouldering in the dust. The monk died, and the prophecy was fulfilled. The castle became the ruined place you now see it, and its proud owner died, and with him died the title, for he had no successor."

"Well, well," said the stranger, "what of all this? Surely you are not so absurd as to believe—"

"Wait a moment, sir," interrupted the landlord, with an assumption of great solemnity—"wait a moment, and you shall hear. From that time, at occasional intervals, flitting lights were seen among the deserted walls, and the strange noises heard of which I have spoken. Then one day a man came to the village, who said that, as he passed by the castle, he caught sight of a strange, dim, shadowy figure. The form, he felt certain, was that of a monk. He was closely enveloped in a large gray cloak, the cowl of which was thrown back. He saw an aged, pinched, wasted countenance, the lower part of which was completely hidden by a huge white beard."

"Well, what of that?"

"He was believed by some, disbelieved by others. The ruins were searched, but no trace of a living being found. Then this man died suddenly, and within nine days after the time he had seen the spectre. This happened again and again, until it began to provoke attention; and as all those who had seen this apparition died within nine days of doing so, there was only one reasonable conclusion to be arrived at, which was, that the appearance of this figure was a sure forerunner of speedy death."

As the landlord finished speaking, the rest of the company nodded their heads, while others murmured:

"That's true—quite true, and we never knew anyone who had seen the spectre live long afterwards."

It may seem strange, but this narrative produced a very deep effect upon our two friends.

Strive as they would, they could not altogether shake off a certain superstitious feeling that came creeping slowly over them.

What if there should be some truth in this wild legend?

They had seen this figure, beyond all doubt—the description given corresponded with its appearance; how, then, should it be if it foretold their own death?

Nevertheless, they listened with attention to the reply the stranger made.

"A very pretty story," he said—"very good indeed—just what I should have expected under the circumstances."

"Then you don't believe it?" said the landlord, aghast.

"Certainly not; I would refuse to give credence to any such rubbish."

"Rubbish?" repeated the landlord. "It is true. I have not lived here all these years without knowing it. We began to think at one time that the ruins had been set to themselves—that the spectre would trouble us no

more. All at once, however, he was seen, and from that time no one has ventured to go near the place, nor would anyone who had the least regard for their own lives."

"Bah!" said the stranger, more contemptuously than ever. "Get me another glass of brandy, landlord—a little stronger than the last; and, while you are about it, bring one for yourself, at my expense, and after you have drunk it you will laugh at the idea of having entertained these superstitious follies."

"Never fear, sir," said the landlord, as he rose up to execute this command—"I know what I know, and a glass of brandy will make no difference to my feelings."

The stranger smiled again, but remained silent until the landlord returned.

"Hark ye, my friend," he said. "I am bound on rather pressing business just at present, but when I again come this way, if I can spare the time, I will pay a visit to those ruins, and if I see the figure you describe, my sword shall find out what it is made of."

"Then, for your own sake," said the landlord, "as you seem a brave, generous gentleman, though rash and venturesome, I hope that you will never come again. I should be grieved if any mischief overtook you."

"Thanks," said the stranger; "but I shall not forget, and before many days are over you may expect to see me. I have laid many a ghost before now in foreign lands, and if time was less pressing I could give you the account of several; but I must stay no longer. Good evening!"

He drained his second glass as he spoke, and sauntered in an easy, careless manner from the room.

He had ordered his horse to be ready at a certain time. It was at the door waiting for him, and those within the inn, having listened for a moment, heard him depart, setting forward at a rapid rate.

"There are people," said the landlord, breaking the silence, "who believe nothing that they cannot understand, and I take it this gentleman is one of them. If anyone would offer me untold gold I would not venture within half a mile of the old ruined castle."

"Nor I," said Claude. "I should think any man who did so had more foolhardiness than true courage."

This was a sentiment very much approved of by all present, and it was applauded accordingly.

Claude continued:

"As our worthy landlord says, there are plenty who profess to believe nothing, and to fear nothing. I have known many such, and yet have found that whenever they have been put to the test they have been found wanting."

"You speak most sensibly," said the landlord, "and like a man of experience and discernment."

"I speak as I feel," said Claude Duval, "though I thank you for your compliment all the same."

In conversation such as this the hours slipped quickly by, until it became very late indeed.

The guests one by one took their departure, until only our friends were left, so at last they, with great reluctance, rose to depart.

They failed, however, to learn any additional particulars respecting the ruins and the legend attaching to them.

"It is late to set forth on foot to-night, gentlemen," said the landlord, when they had expressed their determination to leave. "You can have here the best of accommodation."

"I don't doubt it," said Jack, "and we would gladly stay if our business was less important; but you must allow us to know best, and so good-night."

With these words our friends departed.

The landlord came with them to the door with the intention of fastening it after them.

Observing this, the two highwaymen took a direction that led them directly away from the castle, so that there should be no fear of giving rise to any suspicion.

They walked on rapidly and in silence until they judged they had got to a sufficient distance to make it safe to bend round towards their destination.

At length they did so, and Sixteen-String Jack broke silence by saying:

"Claude, my friend, what do you think of all that we have heard to-night?"

"Think of it?"

"Yes. Does not the description given by the land-

had agreed exactly with the appearance we have seen?"

"It does indeed!"

"And suppose," said Jack, hesitatingly—"suppose there is some truth in it, after all? Suppose what we have witnessed heralds our own death?"

"I refuse to entertain the idea at all," said Claude, "though certainly the legend is more likely to be verified in our case, I take it, than in any others, for who runs such continual narrow escapes from death as we do?"

"Don't mention it, Claude," said Jack—"or, at any rate, in that tone."

"I will not. Do you know that I felt strongly inclined to remain at the inn until early morning, and then take our departure?"

"And why did you not?" said Jack. "How much more pleasant it would have been!"

"I should have done so but for one determination."

"And what was that?"

"Why, I was resolved, if possible, to set this affair at rest without delay. Understand me distinctly. I hope, Jack, that you will second me in all I intend to do."

"Well, say on."

"In the first place, then, I am more convinced than ever that it is some person who has a motive for remaining in concealment who has chosen to play the part of this apparition. At any rate, should we see it again, I am determined to follow it closely, and learn whether my conjecture is well or ill founded."

"I will be with you to the utmost, Claude," was the reply, "for it would be a great satisfaction indeed to my mind to discover that what we have seen is nothing more than a human being like ourselves."

"Come on, then, move quickly, and we shall reach the ruins before midnight. We must not forget that stranger—he is a bold, resolute man: I read it in his eyes."

"You are right. He will be as good as his word, I'll warrant, and the next time he comes he will make a narrow search."

"Well, we must take our departure before then. Recollect that to-morrow will be the fourth day. We shall not have much longer to wait."

Shortly afterwards the highwaymen reached the ruins of the castle.

Their first act was to make their way immediately to the place where they had left their horses.

They were much rejoiced to find that the animals were safe.

Yet they had a look of distress that puzzled them.

"What ails the animals?" said Claude. "How odd they look! One would think that they had seen the ghost."

"Bah—nonsense!"

"But hark! I can hear midnight pealing forth from the village church. Leave the cattle to themselves awhile, and watch with me."

Filled with an irrepressible curiosity, Sixteen-String Jack obeyed.

They took up as nearly as possible the positions they had assumed on the preceding night, and gazed with fixed attention on the spot where the figure had made its appearance.

The night was not so favorable for their purpose; but their eyes had become tolerably well accustomed to the obscurity.

As the last stroke of the hour of twelve died away, Claude pressed his companion's arm, and whispered:

"Look, it's there!"

For a few fleeting seconds, despite their resolution, the highwaymen could not stir.

Slowly the figure advanced, walking steadily, and appearing as though it intended to make a complete circuit of the courtyard.

The highwaymen shrank farther back into the shadow.

"He comes," whispered Claude—"he comes, and if he passes this spot we will step forth and follow in his track wherever he may lead."

Sixteen-String Jack did not reply. All his faculties were bent upon watching the mysterious figure, which approached with a slow and steady motion.

On it came, nearer and nearer still.

The silence was so profound that the highwaymen were compelled to hold their breath. It seemed to them the

slight noise made by breathing was sufficient to discover their presence in that place.

As the figure drew nearer, a distinct rustling sound reached their ears—such a sound as would be made by any person walking in a large and heavy cloak.

No footfall was, however, audible.

Directly afterwards the figure passed them, and as soon as it had gone forward a few paces Claude Duval murmured, with great emphasis:

"I will stake my life, Jack, that what we have seen is no spectre, but a man. Come quickly—follow in my footsteps; but use all caution. We will track him, and solve the mystery."

Noiselessly the highwaymen emerged from their place of concealment, keeping close under the shadow of the huge walls.

They advanced with the utmost caution, pausing every now and then, when the figure seemed about to turn round and look back; but it continued its solitary walk, not turning its head either to the right or to the left.

After going a little further, Claude noticed that they were proceeding in the direction of the keep.

Dimly defined in the darkness they could see the doorway through which they had previously passed.

The figure approached it, and then in a moment became lost to view.

This disappearance was, however, easily accounted for by the darkness, which was so dense in this part that Claude almost lost sight of his companion.

"We have lost him, I fear," he whispered. "But come on, Jack. If he has ascended the steps we have him sure."

Groping their way forward, the highwaymen crossed the threshold, and, reaching the foot of the stone steps, began to ascend as rapidly as they were able.

They listened, thinking perhaps to hear a footfall, but if so they were disappointed.

All was silence, save the whistling of the wind among the walls.

The summit of the keep at last was reached, and then they glanced around them quickly.

No sign, however, of the mysterious figure could be found.

They searched narrowly into every corner, and convinced themselves that no one was in hiding.

"He has disappeared," said Jack, in rather a changed tone—"vanished utterly!"

"Yes, he is out of our sight," said Claude; "but I see nothing extraordinary in that. These ruins must possess many chambers, the existence of which are unknown to us; in some one of them this figure must have sought shelter. Let us descend and keep a closer watch; it is possible we may see him even now."

Jack shook his head; but, nevertheless, willingly enough followed his companion down the staircase.

They paused again just outside the doorway.

Claude was about to speak, when all at once, a strange, odd rumbling noise assailed their ears.

"What's that?" asked Jack, suddenly—"what is it? The ground fairly seems to shake under my feet."

"It does—it does," said Claude.

"And do you remember what the landlord said," added Jack. "He spoke of thunder underground. Is not that just what this sound resembles?"

"It does. But hark! let us listen, and try to follow in its direction."

They advanced a few steps; but the rumbling increased.

Then there was a sudden noise, as of an explosion.

After that all was silent.

CHAPTER CMLVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKE A MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

"We shall soon be into the heart of the mystery, I take it," said Claude Duval—"that is, if you, Jack, will aid me in probing it to the utmost."

"I am always with you."

"Yes; but not so heartily on the present occasion as you often are; but never mind, we will not speak of that now. We must search."

"But it is dark."

"Very true; but a light can be quickly and easily obtained."

"Think of the danger."

"It is not worth consideration," was the reply. "If any chance passer-by saw it, which at this time of night is scarcely likely, it would be set down as some doings of the ghost."

While he spoke, Claude Duval advanced a few steps, and paused when fairly across the threshold of the keep.

Here the darkness was intense.

"I am convinced," he said, "that the man we saw went this way."

Jack was silent.

Claude, however, busily scattered a small quantity of gunpowder on the ground.

"Jack," he said, "you have some small pieces of wax taper, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Get one ready, then, and I will soon have a blaze."

While Sixteen-String Jack produced a small piece of taper from his pocket, Claude Duval snapped the lock of an unloaded pistol.

As the flint struck against the steel a shower of sparks came forth.

The gunpowder ignited, there was a momentary light, and then he picked up the piece of paper on which the gunpowder had been placed, and which was now fairly in a blaze.

The candle was quickly lighted, and as soon as it had burnt up a little and sent forth its full amount of illumination, the highwaymen looked around them with the greatest possible amount of curiosity.

Nothing of a more striking character than rough crumbling walls met their view, but Claude searched closely and narrowly, and at last uttered an ejaculation.

"Here you are, Jack," he said—"here's something like convincing proof, and we are on the right track."

He pointed as he spoke to what bore some resemblance to a door, though time had changed its aspect, and that of the wall in which it was placed so much, and had, so to speak, so assimilated them, that it was hard to tell one from the other.

What struck Claude's notice, however, was a small piece of gray cloth that appeared to be sticking out from two stones in the wall.

Sixteen-String Jack, whose attention was called to it, bent down and examined it attentively.

"There," said Claude, with great complacency, "that looks as though I was near the mark. Take hold of it, Jack, and tell me whether that cloth has not a most material feel."

"It has indeed."

"Well, then, as I never heard of a ghost walking abroad with a substantial cloth cloak wrapped around him, we may conclude that what we have seen is no spectre at all."

Sixteen-String Jack began in good earnest to think so—yet, strange to say, he was not altogether convinced.

Claude continued:

"I knew the fellow went this way, and in passing through this doorway you see he has shut part of his cloak in with it, and then has impatiently torn it away—a very incautious proceeding on his part; but perhaps, now, immunity from interruption has made him over bold."

"And shall you open this door, Claude?"

"Certainly I shall, if I am only able, and that I doubt not."

Even while he spoke, Claude Duval felt industriously all over the door, but failed to discover any kind of fastening.

At length, however, after much searching, he discovered a small knob of iron, that was scarcely raised above the level of the woodwork.

This he pressed upon with all his strength, and the door creaked slowly open.

The very moment, however, that it swung back upon its hinges, such a gust of smoke and dense, disagreeable vapor poured forth that the highwaymen staggered back before it, and gladly retreated to the open air.

The smoke followed them in strange, waving masses, and, curling upwards in fantastic shapes, was quickly lost to sight.

The two friends regarded each other for some time in silence, and at last Sixteen-String Jack said:

"You seem perfectly correct in all your assumptions, Claude; one would think that you had some knowledge of this affair beforehand."

"Why so?"

"Because you have insisted all along that everything we have seen has been real and not supernatural—among the rest, this explosion, and here we have the smoke."

"Yes, that's what puzzles me," said Claude—"I can't make out what has caused the explosion. I expected to smell gunpowder; but this vapor is altogether unlike it; it seems poisonous."

"It does indeed."

They lingered for some time longer; then, when they considered that sufficient time had elapsed for all the pent-up smoke within the doorway to disperse, they relighted the taper, which had been extinguished by the wind, and again advanced.

Gazing across the threshold of this hidden doorway, they now indistinctly made out a rude flight of steps, descending spirally, as it seemed, into the depths of the earth.

They approached nearer and listened.

But no sound reached their ears.

Although the dense vapor was no longer visible, yet they were still sensible of its presence, for the air was hot, and seemed to scorch their lungs as they breathed it.

It seemed, indeed, as though the atmosphere was loaded with some powerful acid.

Nevertheless, they descended cautiously the flight of spiral steps.

They had not far to go to reach the bottom; then, looking around, the highwaymen perceived, branching off in various directions, what seemed to be an extensive series of vaults.

No doubt, in former times, they had served as the cellars of the castle.

All these passages, save one, seemed bathed and dripping with moisture; that one, however, presented a remarkable contrast to the rest, for it was completely dry.

This, then, was the direction the highwaymen took, and soon they saw before them a wide-open door.

At every step they now advanced, the impurity of the air perceptibly increased.

They experienced great difficulty in breathing.

Yet, impelled by the strongest curiosity, they struggled on.

Reaching the door, they saw, by its appearance, that it had been suddenly and forcibly wrenched open, no doubt by the force of the explosion which had unquestionably taken place.

Having penetrated thus far into the recesses of the castle, a strange sight was revealed to the view of the highwaymen—a sight which well repaid them for all their trouble.

In a spacious vault that was lighted by a bright fire, burning in a singular-looking iron basket, they perceived, ranged along the walls, numberless strange, fantastic objects, most of them unfamiliar to Sixteen-String Jack, but not to Claude Duval; and it is probable that these objects, as well as those suspended from the ceiling, would have attracted much more of their notice had not their attention been suddenly directed and wholly absorbed by another object, that was lying at full length on the ground near the centre of the vault.

This was evidently a human form.

They shrank back a little upon beholding it, then rapidly advanced.

Crooping down, then, they perceived the body of a man well advanced in years.

He was strangely and fantastically attired, and his whole frame was reduced to such a degree of attenuation that the bones seemed ready to break through the skin.

A large beard covered his breast, doubtless it had been white, but now it was shrivelled, scorched, and blackened by smoke.

The features also were perfectly black, and so fearfully convulsed that the two highwaymen turned away, unable to look longer upon them.

Sixteen-String Jack turned an inquiring gaze upon his comrade.

"All this looks strange enough to you, Jack, no doubt," said Claude, "but if you will remember what I told you of my early life you will believe that it is fully comprehended by me."

Jack nodded.

All these strange-looking vials, bottles, alembics, and retorts are used in alchemy, and this man, beyond all doubt, was one of those dreamers who believed it was possible to discover some preparation of drugs that would have the quality of prolonging human life to an indefinite extent, and also that some substance might be found that would change baser metals into gold."

"Yes," said Jack. "I have no doubt that such is the case. But how do you account for his death?"

"Oh, it is very simple," said Claude, pointing to the ruins of what had served a short time since for a furnace. "In some of his experiments he has made use of some explosive compound, and you behold the effects."

"Yes," said Jack. "But do you mean to tell me, Claude, that you had no certain knowledge that this was the actual state of affairs?"

"I assure you I had not, but from the first I believed that all these supernatural stories had sprung from some such cause as we have traced them to. This man, no doubt, for his chemical experiments, has been in danger of his life as a magician, therefore he has come here to screen himself from notice. He has been wholly given up to the pursuit of his art, and, knowing how credulous all these country people are, he has had no difficulty in causing all those strange sounds which were believed to be caused by supernatural agency. Leaving him for a moment out of the question, however, it strikes me that we have made a most important discovery for ourselves and for our friends."

"How so?"

"Is it possible the idea does not suggest itself to you?"

"What idea?"

"Why, have we not been turned out from one place of refuge, and have we not, in the most extraordinary manner, discovered another equally as good—perhaps, for aught I know, better?"

"Do you allude to this place?"

"I do. Just think for a moment how easy it would be for us all to take up our quarters here unseen, and then, having done so, how we can keep off all intruders, by personating the spectre occasionally. As for the rumbling noises, no doubt I shall find among the materials here the means of producing them."

Sixteen-String Jack remained for a few moments plunged in deep thought.

Then he exclaimed:

"Safety is a point to be borne in mind before every other consideration, is it not?"

"questionably."

"Well, then, safety is promised us if we remain in this gloomy subterranean abode, but I confess nothing else than that would reconcile me to it."

"Pooh—pooh! You will soon become accustomed to it. Moreover, it is only requisite that we should have some place of concealment to which we could retire whenever circumstances made it necessary. We can clear this vault of that"—Claude pointed to the body of the alchemist while he spoke—"and we can also sweep away all this lumber. Rely upon it this can be turned into comfortable quarters."

Sixteen-String Jack began to think so, but, above all, he was impressed by the probability of security that was held out to them by remaining here.

It needed only a little more conversation with his companion to make him resolve upon this course, and, having once arrived at a determination, Claude instantly set to work.

In the first place, the body of the old alchemist was rolled up in his cloak, and then, between them, they carried him out of the vault and up the steps into the open air.

In a remote corner of the ruins they scooped out a narrow grave by means of their swords.

In this they placed him, and then returned to the vault.

In less than an hour a wonderful difference was made

in its appearance, and Sixteen-String Jack began to look forward quite hopefully and confidently to the future, and to congratulate himself upon having been so fortunate."

The door at the top of the steps had been closed, and, therefore, they felt particularly secure from interruption, and, worn out by the fatigue they had undergone, both lay down to slumber.

Claude especially was much gratified by his discovery, for he guessed how well it would be appreciated by Dick Turpin.

And, moreover, there was the satisfaction in his mind of knowing that his conjectures had turned out to be perfectly correct.

"With a little management," he said, to Jack, on the following morning, "this place can be made to answer all our wants. I only wish the time would pass away that has to elapse between now and the date fixed for our meeting on Hampstead Heath."

"So do I," said Jack.

"For one thing," Claude added, "we can surely remain here without making any movement that may attract the notice of the police officers, and that will give us all the better chance of reaching the appointed spot unmolested."

"Stay," said Jack. "There's one thing you have forgotten altogether."

"What's that?"

"Why, the promise that I gave to the tollkeeper who proved so truly my friend."

"Yes," said Claude. "I admit I had forgotten that."

"And, what's more," continued Jack, "unless you can show me a full purse, I fancy another adventure will be necessary before we have sufficient to give him. Mine was much lightened, I can assure you, during my stay at the inn."

"And mine," said Claude, "I tossed to those gipsies, or mendicants, or whatever they were. I did so without a thought of the consequences."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"That's always the way—always the way; not that I regret it, for this little incident will serve to break the monotony of our stay in this place."

"And yet," said Claude, "there are many reasons that make it advisable for us to remain quiet."

"I grant that; but what I propose is that we gallop away to a considerable distance from this spot, then lie in wait for an adventure. If it should prove profitable, we will ride off at once to Tyburn Gate, afterwards get some refreshment for our horses and ourselves, and then return here before daybreak."

Claude laughed.

"That's scarcely like keeping in concealment. Depend upon it, if your intention is carried out, we shall raise all the country again."

"But I have given my word," said Jack. "Remember that it must not be broken."

"It must not," was the answer, "and so let us determine at once to set forth at nightfall."

Sixteen-String Jack was satisfied, and said no more.

He looked carefully at all his weapons, and to his supply of ammunition; but as the time came on he continued to exhibit greater and greater signs of impatience and restraint.

Night came at last—just such a night as he could have wished for—cold, dark, and miserable, with a violent wind blowing in sudden gusts, and every now and then carrying with it a scud of rain.

"There could not be a night more to my taste," said Sixteen-String Jack, pressing his hat tightly down upon his head as they rode away from the ruins. "The officers, I take it, will be more inclined to get under the roof of some inn than remain patrolling the roads. We shall have the coast clear, and I never felt in better trim for an adventure."

"Forward, then!" said Claude—"follow me. I will lead the way. All we have to do at present is to take every precaution to remain unseen."

Sixteen-String Jack glanced round him while his companion thus spoke.

The darkness was so great that he could not see far, yet he believed that they were quite alone.

The next moment he followed Claude's example of

setting spurs to his steed, and the horses at once broke into a long, stretching gallop, that in a short time carried them away from the ruins of the old castle.

CHAPTER CMLVII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN AND MAUD IN THE OLD QUARRY.

At length we return to the deep, moss-grown excavation where Dick Turpin and Maud had found a refuge.

It will be recollected that after Dick had congratulated himself upon the safety of the place they were in, Maud had suggested at the same time its disadvantages, and while she spoke, Dick felt, with an uncomfortable sensation at his breast, that should the officers become acquainted with his whereabouts, he would be in a trap indeed.

They would only have to guard the one outlet, and then advance and take him prisoner, alive or dead.

Painfully apparent as this was to his own mind, he strove to make it appear otherwise, and affected only to laugh lightly at Maud's fears.

But she by this time knew him too well to be so deceived.

Her heart sank, therefore, within her breast, for the momentary gleam of satisfaction that she had experienced was quite extinguished.

At every slight sound she would start nervously and shudder; then, bending forward, stretch her sense of hearing to the utmost.

But the thousand and one odd noises that broke the silence of that deserted place passed over without any result; but by the time morning dawned she was completely worn out with nervous agitation.

It was not until long after daylight prevailed above that the glimmer of dawn made itself visible in the depths of the old quarry.

By slow and imperceptible degrees, however, the light increased, and one by one, the rugged features of the place were brought into view.

Dick and Maud both looked around them with a curiosity not unmixed with admiration, for the huge masses of stonework looked picturesque and grand.

The bottom of the quarry was of a much greater extent than Dick had at first imagined.

The ground of which it was composed was broken and uneven, yet, strangely enough, vegetation thrived there, and in many places trees of a tolerable size were growing.

There was a little cascade also, the dancing waters of which made pleasant rippling music, and which, when the sun's rays shone upon them, looked beautiful indeed.

"Come, Maud," said Dick, in as reassuring a voice as he was able to command, "look around you, and feel thankful for the shelter you have gained. Surely, now, if we can but escape the limx eyes of the officers we shall be happy and contented enough until the time of meeting arrives."

Maud sighed heavily, as she said:

"I hope so, Dick—I hope so."

"Do not despond. Come a little nearer to the waterfall; you see it is in the most sheltered portion of all. How soft that mossy turf looks. Lie down there upon it and sleep; you can wrap my cloak around you, and depend upon it, I will keep good guard."

In spite of the anxieties that were crowding at her heart, Maud, who was worn out by the excessive fatigue she had undergone, looked longingly to the spot to which Dick pointed.

It seemed, indeed, like some naturally-made couch.

"You are sure," she said, pleadingly, "that you will wake me at the first approach of danger?"

"I will—I promise you faithfully I will."

"Then I am content."

Wrapping herself up in the cloak, as Dick had suggested, Maud laid herself down to rest, and so perfectly was she worn out, both physically and mentally, that she slumbered soon stole ever her.

Dick remained watching by her side for some time after she slept; then, finding, at length, that she was quite unconscious of all that was going on around, he turned aside, and muttered:

"Now, then, I will take the opportunity of making a thorough search all over this place, and ascertain whether there is any other means of leaving it than that by which I descended."

Thus speaking, Dick moved off, and for a long time was occupied in searching all the nooks and corners at the bottom of the quarry.

As he fully expected, however, he found that there was only one pathway by which the surface of the earth could be regained.

"That, at all events, is one comfort," he remarked, as he folded his arms and fixed his eyes upon the side of the excavation. "I know now that my foes can only approach me at this point, and while I keep watch there, all will go well."

A faint cry at this moment reached his ears.

He recognised it, and turned round suddenly.

Half a dozen leaps took him to the spot where he had left Maud.

She had partially risen to her feet, and there was an expression of terror on her face.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "why—oh, why did you leave me?"

"Simply to look around. All is well, Maud—quite well, for the impression left upon me by my search is, that no human feet save ours have trodden in this place for years and years."

Maud gave a sigh of thankfulness.

"Moreover," said Dick, "you need not fear the unexpected appearance of anyone while you keep your watch upon yonder pathway. You can see how it winds zigzag down the side of the excavation. That, then, I am assured is the only means by which a descent into the quarry can be effected."

Maud turned her eyes in the direction Dick had indicated, and no sooner had she done so than a frantic cry of alarm escaped her lips, while she clung frantically to his breast.

"They come!" she said—"they come! Look—look, they come!"

"Who?"

"The officers! Look—look, there!"

Dick followed the direction of her finger, and then, at the very brink of the old quarry, he saw several small moving objects—so small that they scarcely seemed like human beings.

A second glance, however, assured him that they were, though, owing to the fact that they stood back a little way from the edge of the precipice, he was only able to discern the upper part of their bodies.

"They may be officers, or they may not," said Dick; "but at any rate, do not give way altogether to alarm—be of good heart. Follow me quickly; we will get to the shade of some projection, and then, let the officers be as keen-eyed as they may, I will defy them to detect us."

Maud was half fainting with terror, and Dick found it necessary to raise her in his arms, and carry her to some little distance.

He paused when fairly standing in the dark shadow cast by a huge overhanging piece of stone, the appearance of which was truly terrifying, for it seemed as though about to fall down on their heads.

Although satisfied that he was thus tolerably well concealed, Dick had taken up his position in such a manner that he was still able to command a view of the narrow pathway and of the moving figures at the top.

Whether they were officers or not was more than he could tell at that great distance, for the sun's rays shining down into the quarry dazzled and confused his eyesight.

Both listened, too, with the utmost intension, in the hope that some words uttered in a louder tone than others might be borne floating upon the air.

But no such words reached them—the distance was too great.

Dick Turpin's agitation and alarm—more on account of his compassion than himself—were much greater than anyone could have imagined by his manner.

At length the officers, if such they were, retreated so far from the edge of the excavation as to be invisible.

At that moment Dick drew a long breath of exquisite relief.

"They are gone, Maud," he said—"they are gone. All will be well."

"You say so," she replied, with a wan and sickly smile,



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE RENDEZVOUS ON HAMPSHIRE HEATH.]

"in the hope that you may induce me to believe it, but I know as well as you do that our position is a fearful one, and that if the officers should take it into their heads to descend, nothing could save us from destruction."

"Hush—hush," said Dick, "let us remain silent! Although their voices may not have descended to us, yet ours may ascend to them: at any rate, we cannot be too cautious."

In this remark Mead fully acquiesced, and became silent accordingly.

Slowly—very slowly and wearily the hours dragged away, until the sun passed the meridian and began to sink down slowly to the west.

Of the officers they saw nothing more.

Mead noticed with regret the signs of exhaustion visible in Dick's blanched countenance, and at length she begged:

"Why not gain a few moments' rest yourself, Dick?"

No. 198.—BLACK BESS.

Fear not—I shall be able to keep good watch. I will sit here, upon this piece of stone, and never remove my eyes from the pathway. If I see anyone upon it, or if anything else peculiar occurs, trust me I will rouse you instantly."

"Then if you will, indeed, perform this service, I shall be truly thankful," said Dick. "I did not like to make the request, lest you should be fearful. However, as you say, you will be able to give me timely warning of the approach of danger."

"Yes, yes," she murmured, anxiously, in reply—"you can trust me."

Dick knew this well enough, and therefore hesitated no longer to comply with her request.

He was glad to accede to it, for he thought never before had he experienced such a frightful sense of utter exhaustion.

This cannot be wondered at when the amount of action he had gone through is recollected.

Wrapping his cloak around him, he lay down upon the bank of moss, and closed his eyes in perfect confidence of safety, and was soon asleep.

No words can tell, however, what an amount of anxiety Maud suffered while he was thus unconscious.

With painful intentness she fixed her eyes upon the narrow zig-zag path, and remained gazing upon it till her eyes ached and every object swam before her.

Wearily and slowly the time passed on, yet Dick did not so much as move.

To all appearances he was as likely to sleep for some hours longer.

Maud became somewhat more assured as time passed on, and she discovered that she was not interrupted by any sound whatever.

She felt impelled many a time to arouse her sleeping companion, but every time she overcame the inclination, knowing well how much depended on his strength for the safety of them both.

It was not, in fact, until after the sun had sunk, and a chill air filled the old quarry, that Dick awoke.

He struggled desperately, and seemed as though engaged in a conflict with some one.

Maud's voice recalled him to himself.

"Bah!" he said. "I have been dreaming."

"And no wonder."

"Why, it is almost dark!"

"It is. Do you not feel rested?"

"I feel like myself," was the heartily-uttered response.

"And you have heard nothing—seen nothing?"

"Nothing at all," answered Maud. "The place has been as silent as the grave."

"So much the better, then. Rely upon it, we have found at last a place of shelter. Only one thing is necessary to make it perfectly comfortable."

"And what may that be?"

Dick laughed as he replied:

"Why food, Maud—food! We cannot live without it; and now I have awoke I feel so confoundedly hungry that I could set to work on those hard stones."

Maud smiled, but it was only feebly and wearily.

She was faint and sick for want of food, yet had shrunk from saying so.

Dick noticed the change in her countenance at once, and divined the reason of it.

"Come—come," he said, "cheer up! Don't imagine this any obstacle. I shall speedily overcome it, rest assured."

"How—how so?"

"Why, I will only wait until it grows a little darker, then I will cautiously make my way to the top of the quarry. When certain no one is near to observe my movements, I will cross over the fields to the nearest dwelling I can find, and there obtain what we require."

"But the danger, Dick—the danger?"

"It must be braved and met!" was the response.

"We cannot remain and starve here! Rest assured, however, that I will be cautious to a degree."

Maud was silent, for she felt unable to urge him to remain.

"It has grown dark very suddenly," said Dick, looking around him. "Ah! I see now, that huge black cloud has come up, and if we do not have a storm before long it is very odd to me."

"A storm?"

"Yes; do not be alarmed. How is it, Maud, that the least thing seems to agitate you so dreadfully?"

"Hark—hark!"

Maud held up her hand while she spoke, and just then, the low muttering, rumbling sound of distant thunder reached their ears.

"I prophesied aright!" said Dick.

Scarcely had these words passed his lips than the dark cloud he had pointed out overhead discharged its contents, which came down not like rain, but like a perfect sheet of water.

"Back, Maud—back!" said Dick. "The rocks will shelter us to a great extent."

They moved back rapidly while he spoke.

And the rain continued to fall without showing signs of any abatement.

The rumbling of the thunder, too, increased in loudness, and began to be accompanied by lightning, each

succeeding flash of which seemed more vivid than the preceding one.

The peals of thunder at length became truly deafening, and when the lightning flashed the whole interior of the quarry was brilliantly lighted up.

Maud was greatly terrified, and clung anxiously to her companion's arm.

"We have nothing to fear here," he said, noticing her tremor, "and while the elements are thus at warfare we shall be secure from all interruption."

While Dick spoke, another vivid flash of lightning came for an infinitesimal portion of time.

Every crevice in the rock-work around was clearly revealed.

Maud uttered a faint, low shriek, as she replied:

"No—no! See—see there!"

"See where?" ejaculated Dick, hastily.

"You are too late now," said Maud, "all is dark."

"But what was it you fancied that you saw?"

"It was no fancy—my eyes were fixed upon that particular spot."

"Well, then, what was it?"

"Something like a human form!"

"A human form?" Dick echoed, being unable to say anything else in his surprise.

"Yes—yes; I am sure of it."

"And where was it?"

"Near the top of the pathway, down which it was slowly and with difficulty making its way."

"Nonsense, Maud—nonsense; your fears have deceived you. At any rate, be prepared for the coming of the next flash of lightning, which will doubtless be here in a few seconds; I will watch keenly too, and we will clear up the doubt. Are you sure there was only one?"

"I only saw one," was the answer. "There may have been others—I cannot say."

CHAPTER CMLVIII.

DICK TURPIN WATCHES THE MOVEMENTS OF THE STRANGER IN THE OLD QUARRY.

EARNESTLY and intently Dick Turpin kept his eyes turned in the direction of the path, while he waited with the utmost anxiety for the coming of the next flash of lightning.

Although inclined to believe that Maud had seen what she had described only in imagination, yet he waited in great suspense to be satisfied whether she had been mistaken or not.

Although scarcely probable, yet, for all he could tell, the police officers might in some extraordinary way have managed to track him to the old quarry.

Then again he thought that surely they would wait until the fearful storm had ceased.

The rain which had been descending in such torrents now partially subsided.

But the thunder still rolled heavily.

Then came a tremendous flash of lightning, more vivid and intense, Dick thought, than any he had witnessed.

He was, in fact, half blinded by it.

Maud again uttered a despairing cry.

An ejaculation at the same time escaped Dick's lips.

During the momentary illumination he had caught sight of what was certainly a human figure descending the narrow, dangerous path.

The glimpse he had was so brief that it did not enable him to ascertain whether this individual was habited as a police officer or not.

He was, however, satisfied that he was alone.

"Did you see him?" asked Maud, as soon as the next peal of thunder had sufficiently died away to enable her to make her voice audible—"did you see him?"

"I did—I did; but only one person. Did you catch a glimpse of anyone else?"

"I did not."

"Then," added Dick, "the circumstance is most strange and peculiar. Who on earth could he be who would on such a night as this venture to make the descent of this perilous path? It was dangerous enough when we descended—how must it be in such intense darkness as this?"

Maud did not reply to this question, but asked:

"Was it an officer, Dick? Do you think it was an officer?"

"No, I am almost sure it was not, for no officer would make his way here alone. But keep silent. Let us wait for the next flash, which no doubt will reveal to us something more. At present do not fear—I am no enemy we have nothing to dread."

Nevertheless, Maud clung very closely and tightly to the highwayman.

Another flash of lightning quickly came, and this time both the watchers were better prepared.

They saw, with great distinctness, a man slowly and carefully creeping along the pathway.

Despite the darkness and the many difficulties that were in the way, he had managed to accomplish a considerable portion of the descent, a circumstance which strongly excited Dick's wonder, since it showed that the man must either be urged onward by some powerful motive, or else he was very familiar with the nature of the path which he trod.

"Silence now, dear one," said Dick, in a whisper. "We may be in no danger of being heard, yet let us be careful. Let it be some sort of consolation to you to know that this new-comer, whatever may bring him here, is not a police officer."

"Yet he may be in search of you."

"I scarcely think so; but, at any rate, from one man we have nothing to apprehend. If he sees us I will take good care he does not leave these gloomy depths to communicate the intelligence to others! Now hush—silence!"

Maud was still at once, and after that neither spoke, but both occupied themselves to the utmost in watching the perilous descent of this new-comer.

At every lightning's flash they found that he had managed to accomplish a still greater portion of the descent.

The vivid flashes now came at longer intervals, the thunder only rumbled, and there was every indication that the storm was rapidly passing over.

At length, when the stranger had almost reached the bottom of the pathway, Dick whispered to his companion:

"I have been thinking, Maud, that it is of the highest importance we should gain some knowledge of the motive that brings this man here."

"Surely, yes," was the response; "but how?"

"Do not interpose an obstacle," said Dick, "but promise to assist me."

"I will—I do."

"Then what I have to ask is, that you will remain here, standing beside Black Boss."

"And you?"

"I will creep cautiously across the bottom of the quarry. I am familiar enough with it now to be able to avoid all obstructions, and the darkness will conceal me from view."

Maud trembled excessively as she said:

"You would creep, then, close to this man, and watch his movements carefully?"

"I would take care to keep out of sight and hearing."

"But cannot I come too?"

"You cannot, because then any slight sound that would be made by the progress of one would be doubled, and it is most important that our presence here remains unknown."

Slowly and reluctantly Maud unlatched her arms, and Dick no sooner found himself free than, with a slow and cautious footstep, he began to make his way in the direction of the bottom of the pathway.

The darkness was profound, yet not so great as it had been a short time before, for the clouds above were becoming lighter in color.

Nevertheless, it was no easy task to avoid the many fragments of rock strewn everywhere around, and still more difficult to proceed without creating noise enough to attract attention.

Dick was full of the deepest curiosity to know what possible motive could have induced any person to descend by so dangerous a path into so desolate a place, especially during the raging of a storm.

In the hope that this curiosity would presently be allayed, he crept onward stealthily, and at last, to his

great satisfaction, succeeded in reaching the bottom of the pathway, as he believed, unobserved and unsuspected.

He had only just time to crouch down behind a large jutting piece of stonework before the stranger came into view.

He was not more than two feet distant, so Dick saw him with tolerable plainness, and felt perfectly sure that he was no police officer, or at any rate, not in the garb of one.

When the bottom of the old quarry was reached, the stranger paused and looked above.

A deep groan then came from his lips, and he half muttered some words, the purport of which Dick could not catch.

Then, with a somewhat hasty tread and a firm step, the stranger crossed the bottom of the quarry in an oblique direction.

"What on earth can be his errand?" Dick murmured to himself. "Certainly he is fully impressed with the notion that he has this place all to himself, or he would be more careful to be silent in his movements."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Dick carefully emerged from his place of concealment and preceded to follow in the footsteps of the stranger.

This he had no great difficulty in doing, and the thick green moss which was growing almost everywhere enabled him to tread with an almost noiseless step.

The storm by this time was quite over.

The sky was clearing fast of clouds, and there were indications that the moon would shortly make her appearance.

The stranger did not pause until the opposite side of the quarry was gained, a spot not far from where Maud was standing—so close to it, indeed, that Dick feared he was making his way directly thero, and justly dreaded a discovery.

This fear proved groundless.

"Oh for a gleam of light!" Dick heard the stranger say, in low, deep tones. "But it is useless to think of it; the moon will never light up these recesses. I forget—I forget—my brain reels!"

These disjointed exclamations were in themselves highly provocative of curiosity, and Dick watched more absorbed than ever.

For the next few moments he was scarcely able to make out what the stranger was about, but at last he discovered he was occupied in igniting a small lantern that he had taken from one of his pockets.

He closed the door with a snap, and then through the thick convex lens in front came a broad beam of light, which revealed with great distinctness every object on which it fell.

Dick shrunk down again in concealment, fearful lest the stranger, before entering the recesses he spoke of, should flash the light around him in order to make quite certain that he was alone.

This caution was unnecessary.

Never dreaming that anyone was watching his movements, the stranger, timidly and reluctantly as Dick thought, entered a small crevice or fissure in the side of the rock, so small, and of such an appearance, that anyone gazing at it would have imagined that it was simply an accidental rift in the stone such as is often seen, and penetrated to a depth of a few inches only.

The stranger, however, quickly disappeared.

This proved that it was in reality the entrance to some cavern.

Dick crept forward once more, and, as soon as he reached the indentation in the rock, redoubled his caution.

Gazing in, he could perceive the faint glimmer of the light some distance off.

It was too feeble to enable him to see what kind of place it was into which he was intruding, but extending his arms well in front, he walked forward on tiptoe.

He found the ground beneath his feet tolerably smooth and firm.

Having gone a little distance, he discovered that the light became stationary.

Creeping onward again, and scarcely daring to breathe lest the slight sound should be heard, he at last paused, and found himself in a tolerably large cavern, that beyond all doubt was the work of nature.

In one corner of it the stranger was standing, and Dick after a hasty glance around glided towards him.

The lantern was raised high in the air, but as it was furnished with a bull's-eye, the light fell in one direction only, leaving all around in a darkness that seemed doubly great by contrast.

Dick found that the stranger was speaking in a low, murmuring tone, and at first fancied he was addressing some one.

Ere long, however, he found this to be an error.

Either from some strange habit, or else, perhaps, because he fancied the sound of his own voice took off in some degree the loneliness of the place he was in, the stranger spoke his thoughts aloud.

"It is a foolish fear," he said, as though endeavoring to persuade himself into something he could not believe— "a vain and foolish fear, and to satisfy myself that it is so I will take another hasty glance, even though the sight should drive me mad; it would repay me for all—to make certain that my apprehensions were groundless, to be able, in fact, to laugh at my own fears!"

There was, so to speak, a ghastly kind of cheerfulness in the manner in which the stranger spoke, and Dick wondered greatly what it was that he so longed yet feared to look upon.

Venturing to creep even closer still, he watched with a keen eye the stranger's further movements.

The lantern was placed down upon the ground in such a manner as to throw its light in the direction required.

Then the stranger, advancing to the wall of the cavern, stooped down, and seized hold of a huge piece of rock.

Grasping it with both hands, he pulled and tugged with all his might, striving to dislodge it from its position.

As he did so, small masses of earth and stones fell continually upon him from the wall of the cavern, which, oddly enough, seemed to be composed of some soft material.

Needless of all this, the stranger continued his frantic efforts.

Dick marvelled greatly at his strength, for the huge piece of rock was, inch by inch, drawn further out into the cavern.

At last, after incredible exertion, it was quite removed, and then a small opening was disclosed not much larger than would allow a man to crawl through it.

This the stranger, having picked up the lantern, prepared to do.

He cast one hasty, timorous glance around, then, evidently nerving himself for a great effort, and summoning up all his courage, he crept through the opening.

As he disappeared, Dick drew closer, and endeavored to ascertain where the stranger had gone, and what it was he was looking for.

The opening in the side of the cavern was not of any great extent, and Dick caught sight of him only a few feet distant.

"Yes, yes," the stranger said, and his voice sounded odd and muffled, owing to the strange place he was in, "I know I have been needlessly terrifying myself! The evidences of my awful crime are safely hidden where they will never be found. I feel it—I know it! But yet, if I could only summon up my courage for one glance, I should then be sure—quite sure! And if I go away without, all my old tortures may return. I will do it!"

The last words were pronounced with great determination, and the stranger crept a little way further in.

Then he raised the lantern for a moment, turning its beams full before him.

Then Dick saw something which, when he afterwards came to consider upon it, he fully believed was the remains of some human being.

The glimpse he had was a most transient one—the stranger turned his lantern away almost instantly.

But then Dick's attention was distracted by a circumstance which was well calculated to do so.

He had noticed, on first approaching this opening in the cavern, that the soft earth fell down continually, and all at once he became conscious that the fall was greater every moment.

Then, beyond all doubt, he felt that this opening through which the stranger had passed was gradually closing up.

The earth above, unable to sustain its own weight, was rushing down.

Instinctively he drew back, and at the same moment he uttered a warning cry.

"Quick—quick!" he cried. "Escape—escape while you have yet time! This support of the cavern is falling in!"

A dead silence followed his words.

Then came a wild shriek and an awful, mocking laugh that raised many strange echoes in that gloomy place.

The lantern fell from the terrified stranger's trembling grasp, and it was extinguished instantly.

Almost at the same moment, with a hideous rush, the earth descended, and the opening in the wall of the cavern was choked completely up.

So suddenly did all this take place, and so singular was the whole affair, that Dick Turpin remained for some time motionless in the dark cavern, for the simple reason that he was unable to collect his faculties sufficiently to stir.

Then all at once there broke in upon him a perfect understanding of his own great danger.

He was in a huge cavern, from which, for aught he knew, there might be several modes of egress.

In the intense darkness that prevailed, how would it be possible for him to discover the right way out?

His heart beat rapidly, each throb seeming to send the blood with greater force into his brain.

He grew faint and dizzy.

"Courage, Dick," he muttered, at last—"courage! This will never do! I have only to preserve my coolness, and then in a little while all will be well."

Although he said this, Dick could scarcely bring himself to believe it; but as soon as he had finished speaking, he began to grope his way forwards, as he believed as nearly as possible in the direction of the exit from the cavern, through which he had so lately passed.

But the darkness altogether confused and baffled him.

Onwards—onwards he crawled, and it seemed to him as though he should never be able to reach the opposite side.

Could he but once place his hand on the rock-work he would then have better hopes.

At last he succeeded.

The walls were damp, slippery, and smooth.

He passed his hand rapidly over them as he advanced, and having taken many steps, he stopped to think, for no trace of the wished-for opening could he find.

CHAPTER CMLIX.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

A FEELING of intense and horrible despair overspread Dick Turpin's heart.

He thought how fearful a thing it would be to remain pent up in the darkness of that cavern, unable to grope his way back again to daylight.

He raised his voice and cried aloud, but no response whatever, save the dull, mocking echo of his own voice, reached his ears.

Then, all at once, he recollected something, which it is wonderful indeed he could have forgotten for so long.

That was, that he had about his person the means of procuring a light, by the aid of which what would be more easy than to escape?

His anger with himself upon making this discovery knew no bounds—he was unable to account for such strange forgetfulness.

It is not at all wonderful, however, when it is considered how well calculated such an adventure as he had just met with was to throw the mind of anyone off its balance—in fact, while seeking to escape in the darkness he had, so to speak, confounded himself with the miserable denizen of that inner and smaller cavern.

For him there was no hope, and all the time while groping forward, Dick had fancied that the darkness took strange shapes, and in imagination he could see the stranger vainly endeavoring to effect his own release.

Having the prospect of the fate of this unhappy wretch so prominently before his mind deprived him of all his usual coolness and self-dependence.

Now, however, quite a reaction came over him, and he began hastily to feel in his pockets for the objects he required.

They were ready to his hand, and in a few moments

more, literally speaking, the darkness of the cavern was made visible by the flame of a tiny wax taper.

Dick waited till it had burnt up a little, then, the moment he cast his eyes around him, uttered a cry of surprise, in which satisfaction was strongly mingled.

In fact, only a few paces before him was, he believed, the very identical opening in the rock through which he had so recently made his way.

Even in the darkness, had he groped forward half a dozen steps at the utmost he would have discovered it.

Near the walls of the cavern the ground was damp and wet, so that every step he took left a distinct impression behind it.

Noticing this, he looked closely down at the flooring of the passage he had just discovered, and was rejoiced to find traces of recent footprints upon it.

With rapid, flying steps, he hurried on, and the next moment, with a sigh of unutterable, inexpressible relief, found himself once more standing in the open air.

He could scarcely believe even then in the reality of his escape and of the extraordinary events that had so recently occurred.

Did not the presence of the stranger and his awful fate seem more like a wild dream than aught else?

He was recalled to a full and perfect consciousness by hearing his name pronounced by a voice whose accents he knew full well.

He uttered a word in reply and hurried on.

Fain would he have kept from Maud the horrifying details of the scene he had witnessed, but she was persistent in her inquiries, and he had no resource but to tell her all.

She was overcome with horror and dismay, and when the final catastrophe was described, shuddered from head to foot.

"And—and," she exclaimed, with blanched lips, "do you really think that there is no means of freeing him from his present terrible situation?"

Dick shook his head.

"None whatever," he replied. "The nature is such that hundreds of tons of earth must have fallen down and choked up the mouth of the passage, and it would require the labor of many hands for a long period to open it again."

"And before that time——"

"He would be dead," added Dick, "if he be not so already."

"But his object in coming here?" said Maud—"what can have induced him to do so? How strange that he should walk thus to his own death!"

"Strange indeed! But from the muttered words I overheard, and from the momentary glimpses I obtained of the inner cavern, I feel sure that that man, whoever he may be, had murdered some one, and, in order to conceal his crime, had placed the remains of his victim there, blocking up the outlet with the huge mass of rock I spoke of."

"Horrible—horrible!"

"Truly so; but what a strange retribution there is in it all. I feel certain that the poor wretch had been haunted and terrified by continual apprehensions that the body of his poor victim was not safe—that by some means or other it had managed to escape; that feeling had grown and grown upon him until he could resist it no longer, and so, you see, he had made his way to this lonely spot, perhaps choosing to do so on this night of fearful storm, because he would then be more likely to be unobserved."

As she listened, Maud's terror seemed to grow greater and greater.

Probably she began now fully to realise the awful event.

She sank back slowly, and would have fallen had not Dick stretched out his arm to save her.

"This has been too much for you," he exclaimed; "I feared it would be, but you were so persistent, that I could not refuse."

"No—no," she murmured, feebly, "it is not that, Dick, so much that causes this dreadful feeling of faintness as it is the want of food."

"Of course it is!" cried Dick, whose pangs of hunger had for the time passed away—"of course it is! I forgot that. You shall not remain much longer without what you need."

"No—no, Dick, do not—do not leave me!"

"But I must. Believe me, you will be quite safe. I will hasten back with all possible despatch. There is no difficulty in the matter—none whatever; I shall soon return."

Not without much difficulty did Dick succeed in tearing himself away.

Having at last parted, however, he hurried quickly towards the foot of the pathway, and ascended with much greater speed than was at all consistent with his personal safety.

Full of eagerness, he bounded on, never pausing until close to the brink of the excavation.

Then he stopped a little to recover his breath and to glance around him.

As he fully expected, yet, nevertheless, to his great satisfaction, he found that no human being was in sight.

Cautiously, then, he raised himself up, until he fairly stood upon his feet in the meadow.

The night was still squally and dark; every now and then the wind blew furiously, and at times a few drops of rain would be carried towards the earth with terrific violence.

"So much the better," muttered Dick, as he took note of the aspect of the weather—"so much the better. I am less likely to meet with any person abroad."

Quite at random he struck across the meadow, hoping ere long to find himself near to a small village, or else some habitation where he should be able to obtain the articles he required.

Presently, feeling certain that no one was near, he increased his speed, for he knew full well how lonely Maud would be left to herself at the bottom of the excavation, and was desirous of returning to her as soon as possible.

As he advanced he looked scrutinisingly around him, and at length uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

Far away in the darkness he could perceive a faint twinkling light, evidently proceeding from the window of some habitation.

What kind of place this might be he had of course no idea, yet he hastened towards it full of hope.

From its position, and the nature of the ground around, he was not long in coming to the conclusion that it was a farm-house, and having made this discovery he paused awhile, scarcely knowing whether to apply there for what he wanted.

But time was precious, and as he looked about him he could not see a trace of another human dwelling.

It might be that he would have to travel miles before he came to a village.

This probability decided him, and at once quickening his steps, he made his way in a straight line to the farm-house.

Having reached it, he knocked loudly at the door.

Some delay took place before it was opened.

A ruddy-faced girl appeared upon the threshold, who invited him to enter.

The scene that now met Dick's view was one that contrasted very strongly with that which he had just left.

A place more bereft of comforts than the old quarry could scarcely be imagined, and certainly it would be hard indeed to find a place where they were more manifest than at this farm-house.

The huge kitchen was lighted up by the ruddy glare of the fire piled high upon the hearth.

Around were seated several persons of all ages, chiefly comprising the family of the farmer.

An eager gaze was turned upon Dick as soon as he entered.

It was quite an event for anyone of his appearance to cross their threshold.

Dick took off his hat and bowed politely.

"Well, sir," said a voice, proceeding from the chimney corner, "will you be good enough to tell us what you want?"

Dick looked towards the fire, and there saw a small red-faced man seated in a high-backed, old-fashioned chair.

"I have come to ask a favor," said Dick. "It is that you will supply me with a basket of provisions, for which I am willing to pay you liberally."

This probably was about the strangest request that anyone of Dick's appearance could possibly make.

He thought so himself, and wondered what reason he could give for making it.

He was rewarded by a general stare of astonishment, and then the old farmer, slowly removing his pipe from his mouth, echoed:

"A basket of provisions?"

"Yes," said Dick—"a large one. You wonder, no doubt, that I should ask for such a thing, but the fact is I want it for a poor, almost starving family, who have rendered me a service, and I take this way of repaying them."

The farmer could scarcely refuse compliance with this demand, so he answered:

"We have no objection, sir, certainly! What would you like to take?"

"That I leave to you," he responded. "Fill up the basket with whatever you please."

He produced a handful of money as he spoke, and then he noticed, with some surprise, that all fixed an eager, hungry look upon the coins, more especially the old farmer.

The task of filling the basket was now proceeded with, and Dick, jingling the money in his hand, asked "What he should pay for it."

To this there came no response.

"Well, then," he said, "take this guinea—that surely will suffice. The remainder you can divide among your young ones."

"Ah! sir," said the farmer, as he took the coin, "you are happy!"

Dick smiled doubtfully.

"What a thing it is," continued the old man, "to be possessed of money! Here have I been toiling all my life, and behold the result. I have had one bad season after another, until to-night, when preparing myself for rent day, which is to-morrow, I am short of many pounds."

"Indeed?" said Dick, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said the farmer. "And the worst of it is, I have mortgaged my property to one who covets it for himself. Any failure of payment on my part will cause utter ruin—we shall be driven forth quite destitute. I am convinced he would show no pity. Hitherto I have managed, in some fashion or other, to meet my engagements; now I see not the remotest prospect of it—nothing but beggary stares us in the face."

"I am sorry," said Dick, "to hear of your misfortunes, and sorry, also, I cannot assist you; otherwise, I would gladly do so. Yet, in return for the kindness you have done me to-night—which is, perhaps, a greater one than you imagine—I am willing to lend you whatever money I have about me, and you can repay me when better times arrive."

The farmer made some faint and feeble protest against receiving money from a stranger, but Dick took not the slightest notice of his words.

It will be remembered that he had not a very large sum about him, yet he counted it out to the last guinea.

"There," he said, "take it and welcome. When I hear that you are in better circumstances I will come back and claim it."

With these words, Dick rose abruptly to his feet, for he saw the basket had been brought.

He picked it up at once, and, unheeding the cries that were made for him to remain, he opened the door and passed out into the darkness.

CHAPTER CXLX.

THE FARMER'S SON RESOLVES TO DISCOVER DICK TURPIN'S HIDING-PLACE.

No sooner had the door closed behind Dick Turpin than a youth, who had been sitting in a dark corner, rose suddenly, and came to the fire.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a paper, at which he glanced eagerly, spelling it over to himself word by word.

So much absorbed were the rest by the strange incident which had just occurred that they paid no attention to him, nor did he attract their notice until he exclaimed, with loud vehemence:

"I thought so—I thought so. Father, you have let a prize slip through your fingers."

"A prize?" repeated the farmer, gazing at the money in his hand.

"Yes. Don't look at those few paltry guineas. You might have had two thousand and more if we had only been a little quicker. That man who has just left is Dick Turpin, the highwayman—the description is exact. He is hiding somewhere close at hand—that's why he wanted the provisions."

"Well—well," said the farmer, "he behaved liberally enough to me, and in a manner that I imagine few else would, and as he has never done me or mine any harm in his life I wish him none."

"But, father," said the boy, "you have always called me an idle, skulking rascal; now you will find that in point of cleverness I shall be a match for any of you. I have made up my mind to find out where this Dick Turpin is hiding, and I will do it! Don't you know the reward is offered for him alive or dead, and I'll watch my chance, and fetch him down with this. It will be easy enough to say afterwards it was done in self-defence, and no one will trouble themselves to disprove it."

While he spoke, this hopeful son, whose disposition, being so foreign to that of his parents, had caused continual unhappiness, stepped up on to a chair, and reached down from over the mantelpiece a large double-barrelled horse pistol, which all knew well enough was constantly kept carefully loaded.

"Well, Jack," said the farmer, "you are joking sure? Have you no sense of gratitude or humanity left? Didn't that man do for us all he could? and yet you would go out and murder him!"

"You're a fool, father," said Jack, as he bounded towards the door, "and you'd better be civil if you want to make a friend of me. Your troubles have all been brought upon you by soft-heartedness, and serve you right! When I have got the money I fancy you will alter your tone towards me."

"No—no, Jack, never—never! Nothing would tempt me to touch one farthing of money so obtained!"

"Then there would be the mere for me," said Jack, putting on his hat preparatory to leaving the farmhouse.

But the farmer rose quickly to his feet, and said:

"Jack, you have always set me at defiance, but now I will use my authority—I will be minded!"

"Catch me if you can!" was the response. "I'm off, and when I come back I shall be worth more than two thousand pounds! I will find him if it takes me a month; he cannot be far away."

With these words, Jack, having flung open the door, bounded out, and was in a moment lost to view in the darkness.

The farmer and his family gathered around the threshold in a dense throng.

They appealed to the boy to return, their voices going into one chorus, but the sounds were borne away upon the wind, and left unheeded.

"It is useless," said the old man. "He has gone, and all the harm that I wish him is, that he may fail in his villainous design. For my own part, I will take good care he never stands beneath my roof again."

And if to show practically how firm he was in this determination, the farmer shut the door, and closely barricaded it.

Of all this, of course, Dick Turpin was quite ignorant, otherwise he might not have stepped across the field in so confident a manner as he did.

All the way back to the quarry he was indeed congratulating himself upon the fortunate turn affairs had taken.

He considered that by promptly rendering up his purse he had secured the gratitude of the farmer and his family, and that if by any chance they found out who he was that they would not betray him.

The darkness of the night was such that Dick had some little difficulty in finding his way back to the quarry, therefore it is no wonder that Jack should see nothing of him.

Most certainly, however, was this ungovernable boy a foe to be dreaded.

With rapid strides, Dick descended the pathway, and no sooner did he reach the bottom than he heard a faint, low neigh.

Directly afterwards, despite the darkness, he perceived Black Bess standing close to him.

She uttered again a neighing sound, which almost resembled a cry of distress.

Then, turning round, she led the way across the quarry.

Dick followed her with a foreboding heart.

He feared some evil had befallen Maud.

Reaching, at length, the spot where he had left her, his presentiments were verified, for he found she was lying upon the ground in a state of total insensibility—so total that it seemed like death itself.

With much difficulty, Dick restored her.

Her joy was great at finding he had returned in safety—so great that another relapse seemed imminent.

Dick, knowing full well what had produced her swoon, persuaded her to eat, and in a short time he soon perceived that she was better.

The remainder of the night passed away devoid of another incident.

But when the morning came, both Dick and Maud looked around them with more contented eyes than they had done hitherto.

The supply of provisions Dick had brought was not large, yet they fancied by care they would be able to make it last during their stay in this place.

That day, too, and the night which followed it, passed away without any kind of interruption whatever.

On the next morning, soon after daylight, Maud uttered a faint cry of alarm.

Dick turned in the direction she pointed out, and saw, near the top of the zigzag path, the form of a youth, who carried something carefully in his hand, but what it was they could not from that distance make out.

"Another visitor," said Dick, who little guessed who it was or what was his errand. "Well, no matter, Maud, if he brings no one with him all will be well."

"He seems alone."

"He does; and what can be his motive for coming here passes my comprehension."

As the reader will guess, this was no other than the farmer's son, Jack, who had passed the time which had elapsed since we saw him last in searching carefully all around.

The country for miles about was well known to him, and there were many places that he knew of well calculated to serve as hiding-places.

These he had visited first, for, oddly enough, the quarry never once occurred to him.

When, however, he recollected the existence of this place, he felt a conviction that he was at last on the right track, and still carrying the huge holster pistol, he made his way towards it.

He had almost shrank from making a descent into the gloomy recesses of this place, and even now, when he had so strong a motive to urge him on, he hesitated.

This was not surprising, for it required no ordinary amount of nerve and coolness to attempt to walk down so narrow and slippery a path.

Growing stronger in resolution, however, he at length began to descend.

Dick watched him as he came lower and lower, still looking more like a tiny puppet than a human being.

All at once, a shriek escaped Maud's lips, drowned by the loud, hoarse shriek that Dick gave utterance to.

From some cause or other—who could tell what?—the boy Jack in his descent had lost his footing.

Whether it was that he was seized by sudden vertigo, or whether his foot slipped upon the treacherous moss which overgrew the rockwork, they could not tell. Certain it is that, after a frantic but vain attempt to retain his balance, he plunged headlong into the depths of the quarry.

In his fall, he struck from time to time against the many rough projections, and each time with a dull, sickening sound, perfectly audible to Maud and Dick.

Finally, he dropped into a stunted tree, where he remained for a second or two, then fell heavily to the earth.

Dick at once rushed forward to his assistance, though he feared no human aid could avail him.

He expected, indeed, to find nothing but a mangled, shattered corpse.

What was his surprise, then, to hear a faint, deep groan?

This caused him to increase his pace; but when he saw the fearful object lying among the rocks he felt that it would indeed have been a mercy had death come upon him earlier.

Consciousness had not left the unhappy wretch.

Although he had struck so many times upon the rocks, yet the only effect of this was to bruise and lacerate his flesh, and the continual bounding from point to point broke the full force of the fall.

Had he remained among the branches of the tree it is possible that he might have recovered from his hurts.

That last fall on to the mass of broken stones, whereon he lay, had wrought fearful injury.

"My poor lad," said Dick, compassionately, "what can I do to aid you?"

With a painful movement, the boy's face was turned towards him.

No sooner did he catch sight of Dick's countenance than he uttered a cry of despair.

"Curses on my luck!" he said. "I have found you at last; but the discovery is no good—it comes too late!"

"Found me?" repeated Dick, recoiling in astonishment.

"Yes!" said the boy, suddenly and painfully raising himself. "And take that—it will at least be a satisfaction to me!"

While speaking, he suddenly raised a pistol, to which, during his fall, he had clung with a grasp like that of death.

With the speed of thought, he placed it on full cock and pulled the trigger.

No explosion followed, however, for the powder had been shaken out of the pan.

He dropped the weapon with a curse.

Then, with an awful shriek that seemed to pierce through and through Dick Turpin's brain, the wretched lad threw up his arms and fell backwards on the stones quite dead.

CHAPTER CMLXI.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF THREATENED WITH A FRESH DANGER.

"ANOTHER tragedy!" Dick murmured, as soon as he had satisfied himself that life was really extinct. "How strange too!" he added. "He was evidently in pursuit of me, yet surely never so mad as to dream of effecting my capture single-handed?"

A fragment of paper was protruding from one of the pockets of the dead youth, and Dick, impelled by a curiosity which he did not attempt to resist, stooped down and possessed himself of it. Spreading it open, he then found that it was one of the bills offering a reward for himself and his comrades, accompanied by a full description of the appearance of each.

"He was dazzled by the hope of obtaining so large a sum," Dick muttered. "Well, all is over with him now, and I imagine I have little to fear from anyone else. If he had confided his secret to anyone he would not have visited this place alone. Why he should seek for me here baffles me completely."

This might well seem mysterious to Dick, who did not notice Jack while in the farm-house, yet when he came to ponder upon the circumstance, he came without much difficulty to the conclusion that he must be some member of the farmer's family.

Long and anxious was the consultation that took place between Maud and himself upon the subject.

Maud was for quitting the quarry at once, but Dick lingered.

He felt somehow that while there he was safe, and that if he attempted to find any other place of shelter he would only run into greater danger.

The event proved that he was right.

Time passed on very slowly and very wearily for them, but it did pass, and at length the morning of the last day dawned.

"Only a few hours more, Maud," said Dick, "and we shall quit this place, where we have remained uninter-

rupted so long—only a few hours. And I trust that the others have been as fortunate as ourselves.”

Dick had long made every preparation for starting, and so he had nothing else to do but to sit down idly and wait for the coming of night.

Under these circumstances, this one day seemed positively longer than all the rest of the time which had preceded it.

To them, it appeared as if night would never come.

At last the sun sank, and so great was Dick's impatience to depart that he could scarcely control himself so far as to wait until dusk had overspread the earth.

The fate of the farmer's son was to them a caution and a warning as to the manner in which they made the ascent.

For himself, Dick felt little apprehension; all his fears were centred in Maud.

She, however, feeling how much depended on her own coolness, tried her best to retain her calmness of mind, and so by this means the ascent was at length accomplished.

On gaining the level ground once more, both gave a long, deep-drawn sigh of relief.

After that, Dick's spirits seemed to return to him in a wonderful manner.

“Come, Maud,” he cried, “all is well now: and look, Black Bess is as impatient as we are for a gallop! We are a long way from Hampstead, but not so far but that we shall reach it long before the appointed time. No matter, I could wait better there than elsewhere.”

Carefully considering his whereabouts, Dick determined on the direction he ought to take.

Then, placing Maud on the back of Black Bess, he mounted also, and, despite her double burden, the bonny mare set forward at a speed that few steeds could equal.

When Dick felt himself in his accustomed place, and found that he was getting over the ground in such gallant style, his heart throbbed with joy, and he experienced that elation of spirits that can scarcely be produced by anything else than a good ride on horseback.

He seemed at once to throw off all his cares and fears, and his manner had a proportionately cheering effect upon his companion.

He looked on all objects with hopeful eyes.

The darkness rapidly increased; but he trusted entirely to the sagacity of Black Bess to keep clear of all obstacles lying in her path, and therefore made no attempt to restrain her progress.

Under these circumstances, the rough, open country was passed over rapidly in perfect safety; but had Dick taken the management of the reins entirely into his own hands the chances are a thousand to one that he would not have guided her so far without accident.

This he had learned by long experience, and therefore felt none of that timidity which would naturally oppress anyone in a similar situation.

At last he paused near a large white gate, on the other side of which could be seen the smooth high-road.

He listened for some moments, but not the faintest sound was carried to his ears.

“I have a good mind to risk it,” he muttered.

“Risk what?” was Maud's anxious inquiry.

“Why, a gallop along the high-road. It will not fatigue Black Bess half so much as the heavy ground she will otherwise have to pass over, and of late, you must know, her food has been none of the best.”

“Use your own judgment,” answered Maud. “You ought to know far better than I what to do under such circumstances.”

“Then we will try the road,” said Dick, decidedly. “You must remember that the hour is very early yet—too soon almost for the officers to expect to find us abroad; no doubt they will be off their guard.”

With these words Dick slipped down and, unfastened the gate.

He held it open to allow Black Bess to pass through, then secured it again by means of the chain attached to the gate-post.

Once more he mounted, and Black Bess, with a neigh of satisfaction, resumed her former speed, and it was soon manifest that she galloped now with much less exertion.

Fortunately the road was deserted, and this circumstance, strange as it may seem now, was then nothing to be wondered at, for so unsafe were all the highways, and so liable were all passengers to be interrupted by the police officers, that none save those who were compelled by pressing circumstances ventured to travel in the darkness.

Suddenly, however, Dick paused.

He brought Black Bess completely to a standstill, then bent forward and listened.

“What is it?” Maud asked.

“Hush—hush!”

Dick listened for a few seconds, then replied:

“Horsemen are on the road before us—a long way it is true, yet they are approaching, and ere long shall meet.”

“But there will be danger then.”

“No doubt there will—great danger, for the probability is that these horsemen are police officers.”

Maud looked terrified.

“Don't be alarmed,” said Dick—“all is well now that we have timely notice of their approach.”

“But what shall you do?”

“Seek out a shelter. If we can hide ourselves somewhere, the officers will pass by, and then we can resume our journey.”

Dick looked around him while he spoke.

The most noticeable object in the landscape was a picturesque-looking little village church, and on this his attention at once settled.

“There is the place,” he said—“there!”

“That church?” she echoed, in some surprise.

“Yes. Having no suspicions of our presence here, the officers will never dream of looking for us there. Quick—in a few moments we shall be out of sight.”

Dick had satisfied himself that there was no one at hand to observe his movements, and so he made his way at once in a direct line to the church.

The piece of ground surrounding it was bounded by a low stone wall—so low that anyone could with ease have surmounted it, and Dick knew that Black Bess would clear it easily.

She faced the obstacle, and then gave one bound into the air and alighted upon the soft earth in the graveyard.

“Quick—quick,” Dick cried—“on—on! I can hear the officers more plainly now, and we must be out of sight before they come much nearer!”

Black Bess picked her way among the tombstones, and at last reached the huge overhanging porch of the church.

Dick dismounted and assisted Maud to alight, then taking Black Bess by the bridle he led her fairly into the porch, and stood with her close to the church door.

A very deep gloom prevailed about this spot, so dark indeed were the shadows cast, that Dick felt perfectly certain that although the church was near the roadway no eye could possibly detect him.

Nevertheless, both Maud and himself listened with a certain amount of anxiety to the clatter of the horses' hoofs, which increased in loudness at every second.

On the horsemen came at a slashing pace.

They were not visible, being concealed from view by a tall, thickly-planted hedge.

“Another moment,” Dick whispered, “and they will have passed.”

Scarcely had he uttered the words than he was sensible that the whole troop had slackened pace, and then immediately afterwards they all drew up their horses in front of the rustic wooden gate opening from the high-road into the churchyard.

Maud could scarcely suppress a shriek, but clinging tightly to Dick's arm, she whispered, with white lips:

“Surely—surely, Dick, they have not seen us enter this place! If they have, what is to be done?”



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD TAKE SHELTER IN THE CHURCH PORCH.]

CHAPTER CMLXII.

RELATES HOW THE POLICE OFFICERS MADE TOM KING A PRISONER, AND DESCRIBES THE MEANS THEY ADOPTED TO KEEP HIM SECURE.

It is necessary now that we should go back and describe the incidents that befel Tom King, for, as the reader will remember, he was left in a very ticklish situation.

Above him was the sky, on three sides of him stone walls, so high as to be insurmountable, and in front a dense throng of police officers, who completely choked up the roadway.

A cry of gratified surprise and triumph escaped their lips as soon as they came round the bend of the lane and saw the fugitive standing at bay, with all retreat cut off.

They pulled up in some confusion; but in the twinkling of an eye a pistol appeared in every hand.

No. 199.—BLACK BESS.

No. 199.

It was the greatest wonder in the world that these officers did not save themselves all further trouble by simultaneously firing a volley at the highwayman as he sat so calmly before them.

The reward offered was the same whether the prisoner was captured alive or dead.

Had the officers belonged to London, or had been any of those who had been put to so much trouble by the highwaymen, there is no doubt that Tom's career would have been here cut short.

But this was their first adventure of the kind.

They came from a neighboring town, and had great confidence in their own powers.

Instead, therefore, of shooting Tom down like a dog, one of them, who seemed to hold command of the rest, cried out:

"The game's up now—the race is at an end! Give in quietly, and I will take care that you are not hurt."

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To this pacific speech Tom only replied by raising his pistols.

"I hold the lives of two men here," he said, in a calm voice, "and I warn you, if you do not allow me to pass by un molested, I will discharge both my weapons, and do my best to cut a way through you."

"I oh—pooh!" said the officer who had before spoken—"none of that nonsense! If you are not a natural born fool you must know I have only to say the word, and a volley from these pistols will bring you to the ground; not that I want to have your blood upon my hands. I shall be content by capturing you, and handing you over to the proper authorities."

Tom saw at once that this was a dogged, determined man, and could not be dealt with in any ordinary fashion.

Lowering the muzzles of his pistols, he said:

"But if I surrender, what guarantee have I that you will use me fairly?"

"Whatever guarantee you like. I have heard of you before, and if you will give me your solemn word not to attempt to escape I will not handcuff you, or confine your limbs in any way."

"I shall give no such promise as that, rely upon it."

"Then I must take all the precautions I can to keep you safe. Now, then, make your choice. You must know that you are wholly in our power, so which will you choose—death or capture?"

"Capture," answered Tom, at once, across whose fertile brain a plan of escape had flashed—"capture, of course, for then I do stand a chance of my life."

"Well, so you may," answered the officer; "but you will not escape from us—I'll wager my head you won't! But come, you shall not say I have not dealt reasonably with you, so decide. Will you surrender quietly and easily, or shall we use force? We are ten to one, so what could you do on your own behalf?"

"Nothing," said Tom, assuming a more dejected air than he felt. "I give in."

It was plain to see that this was just the answer the officer wanted.

"Very good," he said. "Just give me your pistols, and you must not refuse to submit to any measures that I may take in order to keep you in safety. If you do, it will be quite in vain. Now, then," he added, addressing his men, "get the rope ready, and two of you pull out the largest plank of wood that you can find in yonder fence."

He pointed along the lane while he spoke.

Two men darted off to obey this command, leaving Tom filled with wonder as to what they intended to do with a plank.

"Aha!" said the officer, rubbing his hands gleefully, "those London fellows have made a great fuss, but I fancy we have done them nicely after all! How mortified they will feel! Ah, it's good! It's an honor to all of us!"

The police officers looked vastly pleased, and then immediately afterwards the two men appeared, carrying with them a piece of oak planking of tolerable size.

"The very thing," said the officer—"it could not be better. Now then, Tom, dismount."

Tom complied, but rather reluctantly.

He almost regretted that he had chosen his present course, and wished that he had run the risk of breaking a way through the officers' ranks.

Now he came to look at the men, he fancied it might have been done.

He was still more in this frame of mind when he found himself suddenly seized by powerful hands, and, in spite of the resistance and struggles that he made, was bound round with ropes, and tied very securely with his back on to the plank.

Most especially were they careful to secure his hands and feet, and as they outnumbered him to such an extent they had little difficulty in doing so.

At length, when their work was completed, the men stood aside in order to allow their chief to take a look at what they had done.

His eyes grew bright with triumphant joy.

"That's the ticket! Tom, my boy," he said, addressing his captive, "how do you feel now?—not very comfortable, I should think, and by no means sanguine of making an escape! An escape? Aha! I fancy you or

anyone else getting out of Joe Blogden's clutches! I don't mind telling you my plans, Mr. Tom, I feel so sure of keeping you safe. I mean to carry you all the way from here to Newgate just in the position you now are, and no pretext of yours, no matter how good, shall induce me to loosen one of the ropes. There, now, what do you think of that?"

Tom's heart failed him, for he felt that his chance of escaping was so slight as to be scarcely a chance at all.

Yet he would not allow the officers to perceive what was the true state of his mind, so, in as off-handed a tone as he was able to assume, he cried:

"You're not such a bad fellow after all, Mr. Blogden, and I'll do you a good turn one of these days."

"Aha," said the chief officer, "I am sadly afraid that you will take a turn rather sooner than you expect or desire, by-the-way."

The officers all laughed in chorus.

Tom knew this was intended as a joke upon his being turned off at Tyburn, but he would not understand it so, and replied:

"Yes—I shall take a turn for the better, and, rely upon it, I shall owe you no ill will at all. You have done your duty as pleasantly as a man could."

The officer made a mock bow.

"But," said Tom, "I'll wager you any amount you like that, in spite of all your care and pains, I shall give you the slip before we are half-way to London!"

"Well—well, we shall see," said Blogden, pleasantly. "I am not at all alarmed, and so I give you free leave to try your best."

Then turning round to his men, he said:

"Come—come, we have all the rest of the day before us for our little enterprise, and if we stick to it we shall manage to reach London late to-night."

"But what do you wish us to do, Mr. Blogden?"

"Why, four of you will dismount, and lift that plank on to your shoulders, and carry the prisoner in that manner. Your horses will be taken care of in the meanwhile, and when you have gone a certain distance you shall be relieved, and four others will take your places."

It was evident that the men scarcely liked the idea of this march to London, and Tom King noticed the effect with a great amount of satisfaction.

Already his brain was busy with devising a means by which he hoped to regain his freedom.

His reflections were somewhat disturbed by the officers coming to him and raising the plank in the air.

They were by no means so careful in doing this as they might have been, and even when the corners of the plank were carefully settled upon their shoulders, Tom King found it about as unpleasant a mode of conveyance as could have been thought of.

Mr. Blogden was in the highest possible spirits.

He rode along by the side of the prisoner, and as he drew his cutlass and placed it against his shoulder, he made quite an imposing appearance.

One turn of the rope had gone quite across Tom's throat, and was secured underneath the plank, which compelled him to keep his head in a very uncomfortable position, for if he tried to raise or move it in the least the pressure on his throat became so great as to render breathing impossible.

"I am helpless enough now," he thought. "I wonder what is to be the end of it?"

As they journeyed on, and turned from the lane to the high-road, a fresh danger occurred to Tom's mind, which diminished his chances of escaping most materially.

Indeed his courage failed him when he thought of it.

Before these officers could go far, they would, beyond little doubt, meet with some others, who would join them at once, and then, with the number of his guard doubled, or very likely trebled, how was Tom to slip away from so many watchful eyes?

A cold, clammy feeling came over his heart; but in a few moments it passed away, leaving behind it a much better kind of feeling.

This was a determination to watch carefully for the very first opportunity that presented itself for him to make his escape.

Somewhat to his surprise, they travelled on along the

highway without meeting with a single person; but, then, the hour was early—just after sunrise in fact, and at that hour it was not likely many people would be abroad.

The first four officers carried their burden well; but at length they grew too tired to proceed further so four others took their places.

In this way they journeyed on at what was, taking all things into consideration, a very tolerable rate of speed. Their first halt was made at a road-side inn, a little after eight o'clock in the morning.

This inn had somewhat a lonely situation, for neither human beings nor dwellings could be traced in its vicinity, for it seemed as though it depended altogether upon passers-by for custom.

Upon seeing so strange a procession approaching, every inmate of the place turned out at once into the roadway to catch a glimpse of it, and as they viewed it from the distance many and various were the speculations indulged in by them as to the nature of the object the officers were carrying.

When it was found to be a man, they concluded at once that he was dead.

Great, therefore, was their surprise when the officers, stopping in front of the building, put down their burden and they discovered it was a live man, securely bound with cords.

The plank was placed in a rather slanting position against the tall, massive sign-post which stood in front of the inn.

The position was a very uncomfortable one for Tom King, yet he felt grateful for the change.

It was irksome to remain for so long in a horizontal position.

Moreover, as the officers walked along with irregular steps, his head continually went bump, bump upon the hard wood.

He was well aware that expostulation on the subject would be quite in vain, and therefore said not a word, contenting himself with catching an occasional glimpse of the countenance of the chief officer, Joe Blogden.

He had noticed, as they journeyed on, that the expression of his features had gradually undergone a great and remarkable change.

That aspect of joviality which he had at first worn quite disappeared.

His forehead was furrowed up into reflective wrinkles, his mouth worked as though he was perpetually saying something to himself, and his eyes shone with a bright and peculiar glitter.

What could be passing through his mind Tom had not the remotest idea, nor did the officer drop one hint that served him as a clue.

The apprehensions and curiosity of the dwellers at the inn were quickly put an end to by a statement made by the officers to the effect that they had just been successful in capturing the notorious highwayman, Tom-King, and that they had adopted the means they saw for keeping him in safe custody.

The officers were then highly complimented upon the ingenuity they had displayed.

Although pressing invited by the landlord to enter the inn, they declined to do so, but had a loaf and a huge piece of cheese brought outside, together with some ale, and on this they regaled themselves in the open air.

Tom felt that one draught of the ale would be a most wonderful refresher, but scorned to ask his captors for even so small a favor as that.

Joe Blogden was not, however, a very ill-natured sort of officer, and therefore, when his own wants were supplied, he turned his thoughts towards the prisoner.

"Don't look so down, Tom!" he exclaimed, smacking his lips after the last draught of ale. "You seem quite rueful! What do you say to a drop of this old October? Upon my life, it's the best I ever tasted."

"It would be very welcome indeed," answered Tom; "and if you will put your hand to my waistcoat pocket you will find a guinea there. I am sorry to give you so much trouble," he added, with a smile. "but I cannot help it."

"You mean you cannot help yourself," said Blogden, coming towards him

"Just as you like. But with that guinea, suppose you order a drop more ale all round, and let me have a mouthful of it, for I assure you I am choked with the dust."

Joe Blogden loved a drop of ale, and he had not sufficient command over himself to resist indulging himself in it whenever he had the opportunity; and as for the rest of the officers, Tom readily believed they were nothing loath.

But for this love of liquor, Joe Blogden might have asked himself the question as to how far it was expedient to supply ale to his men.

If his suspicions had been on the alert as they ought to have been, he would have perceived in this offer of Tom King's the first move towards an ultimate attempt at escape.

He did not, however, but with a loud voice called for more ale all round, insisting that Tom should drink a whole quart of it, and declaring that he, Tom King, was the very best fellow in the world.

Presently the ale was brought.

Then Joe Blogden, taking a large foaming measure full, walked towards Tom King and put it to his lips.

"There," he said, "drink away, old fellow—it will do you good."

Tom did drink, and that right heartily; but he did not finish the measure.

Some little time was occupied in discussing this second supply of ale, but at last Joe Blogden gave the order to mount.

Ere doing so, however, he turned towards his prisoner and thus addressed him:

"Tom King, old fellow," he said, "you are one of a good sort, and the more I see of you the better I like you, and that's what makes me repeat the offer that you refused a little time ago."

"What offer was that?" asked Tom.

"Why, you must be aware," continued Blogden, "that while you are tied to that plank and watched by us, you cannot possibly stand a ghost of a chance of escaping, therefore is it not a pity that you should suffer so much discomfort and inconvenience? Now, as I said before, if you will give me your word to make no attempt to escape, you may mount your own horse and trot comfortably by the side of us."

CHAPTER CMLXIII.

TOM KING IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS EFFORT TO ESCAPE.

"I SHOULD be very glad indeed to change places," said Tom King; "the back of my horse would be much more comfortable than this board; but you must not ask me to give you any such promise, because you may depend that I shall take the first opportunity I can find to get away."

"Then stay where you are, and be d—d to you!" replied Blogden, angry that this considerate offer should be refused.

"Don't lose your temper," said Tom. "I am all right, and if you will let me get on the back of my horse, I shall be much obliged to you."

"No," said Blogden, in a sharp, angry voice—"you have made your decision, and you shall abide by it! While you are there I know you are safe, and shall not trouble myself about anything else but keeping you so."

Now the cause of Joe Blogden's anger was that Tom should refuse to mount his steed under the conditions named because, had he consented, much fatigue and dissatisfaction would have been saved his men, and, moreover, the journey to London would have been performed in about one-fourth of the time it must necessarily occupy under the present condition of affairs.

Like a wise man, however, he resolved to say no more upon this subject, but, having seen his men mounted, except those who were appointed to carry the plank, he turned towards the landlord of the inn, and said:

"We are anxious to get to London. Which do you consider the best and shortest road?"

"Well, I can't say," was the landlord's reply. "I can tell you which is the best; and I can tell you which is the shortest."

"Well—well," said the officer, "that's what I mean—the shortest is sure to be the best."

"I don't know about that," responded the landlord,

"for you must understand that if you follow this highway for about eighteen or twenty miles, it will bring you out upon the London Road, which it crosses. You will then only have to turn to your right, and your destination lies before you. And the road is as good every inch of the way as it is about here, so you cannot deny but what it is the best route."

"Yes, so it is," said Blogden, "only it is such a confounded long way. Yonder is the direction to London. Is there no road by which we could take our way across the country, and so cut off that tremendous corner? It's quite out of our way to ride straight on for ten miles and then turn round."

"Well, there is a road," said the landlord, "and that's the shortest; but, understand me very distinctly, it is by no means the best."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Well, then, it's a cross-country road, and I daresay you know what that means. In some parts it is broad and level, and as good as this, but in others so narrow that only about two of you could ride abreast, and with the mud so deep that it will take those who are walking up to their knees."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Blogden, "not after such a season of dry weather as we have had! The road may be muddy, but it is not so bad as you would make it."

"Well," said the landlord, rather huffed, "perhaps you know best."

"Well, but how much shorter is this road?" persisted Blogden. "If we go that way, how many miles shall we save? That's the point I wish to arrive at."

"Well," replied the landlord, "the road is not very direct—it winds and curves about a great deal, but yet I should say you would save ten or a dozen miles."

"Half a day's journey!" ejaculated the officer, in astonishment, for he did not expect that the difference would prove to be so great. "Why, that's the road for us, by all means, even though it should not be quite so comfortable underfoot as this."

"You ought to be the best judge of that," answered the landlord; "but if I had a good nag before me, I know which one I should prefer."

"No doubt," said the officer. "But just tell me whereabouts this road branches off?"

"About three-quarters of a mile further on. You will see an old finger-post up there, which shows you the way. The entrance is dark and narrow, but after you have gone a little way you will find it wider and the ground much improved."

"Thanks!" said Blogden. "That's the way for me, and for you too, my lads! I should think you are not so fond of walking that you prefer to go a dozen miles further round."

The officers assented at once.

"Well, then, as we are all ready," cried Blogden, "we will start. Good-bye!"

With these words he mounted his horse, drew his cutlass again, and assumed the same attitude as before.

He looked very sulkily and angrily at Tom King, and so did the men, for he was considered to be the cause of the present arrangement.

However, the cavalcade set off without any grumbling being heard.

The cross-road was found with an old battered finger-post at the corner of it, just as the landlord had described.

But the entrance was dark and narrow, and, after going a few feet down it, they came to a kind of slough or quagmire caused by the waters of a rivulet that flowed across the road, but which at the present time was almost dried up, leaving its soft, oozy bed exposed.

Through this the officers with difficulty floundered, and when they emerged on the other side the boots of those who were on foot presented a very dirty, disagreeable appearance, for the mud was green and slimy.

However, they marched onward, hoping ere long to reach an improved part of the road.

Here again the landlord proved to be right.

Without the occurrence of any particular event, they continued their slow march.

Tom King began to feel his head ache terribly, owing to the number of bumps it had from the hard plank.

This might, too, be partly ascribed to the ale of which he had partaken, and if so he felt content, for he judged

it would not be without its effect upon his captors, no matter how well seasoned their stomachs might be.

Of course, his mind was still intent upon making his escape, though how this was to be effected he could not at present decide.

When changing bearers, the officers generally paused for a few minutes, placing him, or, rather, the plank, up against a tree, or fence, or whatever might come nearest to hand; and for these brief periods of rest Tom was inexpressibly grateful.

He was chiefly occupied on these occasions in watching the countenance of Joe Blogden, which had again changed, and now presented that peculiar, hungry, anxious look that he had before observed upon it, only that this aspect seemed intensified.

There was one question, however, which Blogden and the officers recollected they had omitted to ask the landlord, and this was, what inn they should meet with upon this road, and how far they were apart.

Now there seemed to be no chance of obtaining this knowledge, for they had not met with or seen a single human being of any description; and it did not appear as though this cross-road was much travelled, for, as a rule, it was overgrown with grass.

In fact, Blogden began to think that, after all, in his anxiety to save distance he had made a great mistake, and heartily wished that he had taken the landlord's advice and proceeded by means of the high-road.

It was too late for this now, and therefore useless to regret, so he continued to urge his men onward, whose grumblings now began to make themselves heard, and which quickly increased in loudness.

The hour of noon approached, and when it came, the officers found themselves still upon the cross-road, and to all appearances no nearer to an inn than they had been for many a mile.

So weary did they become that Blogden was compelled to allow them to pause.

Tom King was put down, and the officers rested themselves by sitting on the grassy embankment upon which the hedgerow was planted.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Blogden, addressing them. "I don't want to remain idly here, so I'll leave the prisoner to your charge while I gallop onward for a few miles and ascertain whether there is a public-house anywhere close at hand."

To this proposal the officers raised not the faintest objection, and accordingly Blogden sheathed his cutlass, struck spurs to his horse's side, and was quickly out of sight.

Now Tom King could not help considering this a favorable opportunity, and yet he was unable to see by what means he could avail himself of it.

He had satisfied himself by repeated trials that the ropes were so firmly tied about him that it was quite out of the question for him to unfasten them without the aid of another person.

He was forced to admit that he was perfectly helpless and powerless, and that all his captors had to do to keep him secure was to fix their eyes upon him from time to time.

Yet he did not despair, and his brain was busily at work devising schemes, when all at once he heard the clatter of a horse's feet, and, looking up, saw Blogden returning with satisfaction beaming from his countenance.

"Up with him again, my lads," he said—"put your shoulders to it; there's a capital inn not much further along the road, where we shall be able to make ourselves comfortable for a little while. I have ordered something good to be prepared, so that it will be nearly ready by the time you arrive."

These words had a very inspiring effect indeed upon the police officers.

They picked up their burden with right good will, and trudged it manfully.

Nevertheless they were all so fatigued that they had to change repeatedly, even in going the short distance that intervened between them and the inn.

At length they came in sight of a poor, wretched-looking dwelling, from the exterior of which a truss of straw was suspended in the place of a sign, and this, indeed, was the only token there was that the house was one of public resort.

A little further on they perceived a place where the

cross-road was joined by several others, so that if the inn had not been here they would have been greatly puzzled to know which was the way to London.

In expectation of their arrival they found a small group of persons waiting outside this hut, for it was scarcely deserving of any better appellation, though on coming nearer and looking more attentively at it, it was evident that at some distant period it had been a substantial, good-looking dwelling, but it had been allowed by neglect to fall into its present miserable and dilapidated state.

A scene of considerable confusion now ensued.

The wonder of the landlord, his family, and dependants was extreme.

Never before in their recollection had so strange or exciting an incident occurred at their doors.

After a time, however, the horses were all stowed away in the rambling, broken-down sheds which existed in plenty at the back of the inn.

Tom King was raised a little, and thus was enabled to take a good look at his halting-place.

As he gazed upon it he became conscious that at some time or other he had seen this inn before, but when it was he could not for the life of him make out.

The countenance of the landlord was certainly a strange one to him.

Matters having been so far arranged, the officers again picked up the plank and carried Tom King through the front door, along the passage, and into the large kitchen in which they had agreed to take up their quarters.

This kitchen was at the back of the inn, and commanded a view of the littered, untidy yard in the rear, and the tumble-down stables beyond.

As before, the plank was placed on end, with the top resting against the wall.

"Now, Tom," said Blogden, "I owe you no ill-will, although you refused my offer before, and therefore I renew it. Your limbs must be cramped by remaining so long in one position, and you must be hungry as well; why not give the promise I require, and then you can sit down among us quite comfortable?"

"No," said Tom, "I very much prefer remaining as I am to making the promise you are so anxious to have. But let me tell you all my bones ache; I am cramped from head to foot by being thus tied to the board. Surely it is not asking too much to request you to release some of the bonds, so that my blood may have a chance of circulating."

"No," said Blogden, decidedly, "you will find me immovable. If you will comply with my conditions, well and good; if not, stay as you are; you can make your own choice."

After that Tom was silent.

A tolerable repast was then spread upon the table, and when he caught sight of the various eatables, Tom King experienced the pangs of hunger very sharply.

Yet he resolved to say not a word.

The officers ate voraciously, and drunk in due proportion, the liquor being as before, strong, home-brewed ale.

When the meal was over, the effects of it and of what they had drunk, and of their fatigue, made themselves manifest.

One by one they dropped off into a doze.

Tom watched them anxiously.

It was quite clear that sleep had stolen upon the officers unconsciously.

Every one who had closed his eyes had left the task of watching to the others.

At last Tom King felt that the opportunity he had been looking for, which seemed so far distant, now had come.

Now was the time to make a vigorous effort to escape. Carefully and yet vigorously he tugged away at the ropes which confined his wrists.

To his joy they slackened a little—a very little, yet enough to endow him with courage and determination.

Time wore on, and the officers still slumbered.

Incredible as the feat may appear, Tom actually succeeded in getting his hands at liberty.

When this was the case he felt that the remainder of his task was comparatively easy.

He went on most vigorously with his work, and so intent, and so wrapped up did he become in it that he

omitted to glance every few seconds at the countenance of his sleeping captors.

When, however, he at last looked up and saw Joe Blogden's eyes wide open and fixed upon him, he gave quite a nervous start of surprise, and dropped the knot he had been attempting to untie.

"Aha!" said Joe, "so you have given me a taste of your quality, have you? Thank you—I am much obliged to you. Doubtless you thought I was asleep. What a mistake! Why, Tom, I have been watching you all the time; and as you have been so clever and done what I believed to be impossible, I shall know what to expect from you if we are in the least degree neglectful. Ho! wake up there!" he bawled, in a voice that seemed powerful enough to lift the roof off.

The officers awoke instantly and sprang to their feet.

Tom King's desperation and anger knew no bounds.

He was almost free, and this made his disappointment all the more bitter.

He resolved not to submit, however, without a desperate struggle.

In his efforts to extricate himself, however, he pulled the plank over, and fell heavily to the ground.

The next moment, all the officers were upon him, the ropes were again crossed and recrossed over his body in all directions, and, indeed, wherever there was a chance.

At last he found himself much in his old position, except that the ropes were tighter, and caused him greater pain than before.

When all was done, Blogden approached and cautiously examined every knot.

"Now you are right, Tom, my friend," he said—"quite right. If you can get out of that, I give you leave to make your escape. You little thought I had my eyes upon you, but—aha!—catch a weazel asleep, Tom, and then you may stand some chance of finding Joe Blogden napping! Aha!"

The officer was so overjoyed at his own preternatural cleverness that he hardly knew how to restrain himself within proper bounds.

The officers of course laughed heartily, and were vastly amused, but the incident terminating so disappointingly to Tom King was a very good lesson to them, since it taught them the necessity of not relaxing in their vigilance for the future in the least degree.

CHAPTER CMLXIV.

IN WHICH JOE BLOGDEN MAKES A PECULIAR PROPOSITION TO HIS COMPANIONS.

So impressed were the officers with this idea, that for some time after the occurrence of the event just described they did nothing but sit stock still with their eyes fixed upon their prisoner.

Observing this, Tom smothered his anger and disappointment as well as he was able, for he knew that if he allowed it to appear in his face the officers would enjoy it and triumph over him.

At last, when they had calmed down a little, Blogden turned towards them and said:

"Now, my lads, just let me know when you think you will feel rested enough to set out again on your journey. It is a disagreeable job, I know, but still, the sooner it is over the better, and when we once get him to Newgate, all the trouble will be off our hands."

"So it will," murmured the officers; "but we are regularly footsore, Mr. Blogden, and do you know how far it is to the next inn?"

"No, I don't; but that is well thought of—I will call the landlord in, and inquire."

Accordingly this was done.

"Now, landlord," cried Blogden, "just be good enough to listen. How far shall we have to travel before we come to the next inn, on the road to London?"

"Well, sir," was the answer, "I should say a matter of fifteen miles."

"Fifteen miles?" roared Blogden. "What do you mean by that? Curse you for a liar! You only want us to remain here in order that you can make plenty out of us! I suppose it is not every day that a large party stops here?"

"If you know better than I do," said the landlord, "what in the world was the good of asking me the question?"

"We don't know; but how can it be possible that the next inn is so far off?"

"Simply because it happens to be the case," said the landlord, with a grin.

The men looked at each other with a very disconcerted and crestfallen air upon receipt of this intelligence.

A considerable portion of the afternoon had now slipped away, for while in their present quarters time passed much too quickly to suit them.

"Why, we should have to travel all night!" ejaculated Blogden.

"That you would," assented the landlord; "and, moreover, if you found your way in the dark you would be a cleverer lad than I take you to be."

"What do you mean by that?" roared Blogden.

"Just what I say," was the response. "The road is so bad and so hard to find that it would be quite a task for a stranger by daylight, and at night would be altogether out of the question."

"Well, we can't stay here," said Blogden, in a decided voice—"that is perfectly certain. We must start off without much delay. But come, landlord, can't you suggest some means by which we can get to London?"

"Well, now you come to ask my advice," answered the landlord, "of course that's another matter; and besides, I am bound to do the best I can for my customers."

"Well—well?"

"Of course," he began, "your prisoner is the difficulty?"

"Just so."

"Well, then, I will tell you something which may perhaps interest you, and you can act upon the suggestion or not, just as you think proper."

"Go on, then; what is it?"

"Why, this evening, about six or seven o'clock, a carrier's waggon will pass here. I know the driver very well and he always stops to take a jug of beer, and nine times in ten the waggon is empty."

"And you would propose—"

"Simply that you lift your prisoner, plank and all, and put him inside the waggon. Some of you could ride inside with him, and the remainder, surrounding the vehicle, ride on horseback."

"Landlord," said Joe Blogden, in a voice of the utmost enthusiasm and joy, "you're a regular downright good fellow! Your advice is worth a heap of money, so just call for whatever you like to drink, and I will pay for it."

"You're very kind," said the landlord, and he glanced uneasily behind him. "But you must just ask my wife."

At this the officers gave a shout of laughter.

"Ask your wife?" said Blogden. "What for?"

"Why, you see, sir, she has a most unaccountable and unreasonable objection to any of the good things down in the cellar passing between my lips. It's too bad, that it is! She keeps everything under lock and key."

"And that makes you like a drop all the more, eh?"

"Well, perhaps it does."

"Then," said Blogden, "as you have got me out of my difficulty, I will get you out of yours; and, if you like, you can amuse yourself by getting blind drunk to-night, and your wife sha'n't know anything about it until too late."

"Don't speak so loud," said the landlord, who was an inveterate drunkard, and who, if not checked by his very strict, resolute better half, would long ago have drunk up everything they possessed.

"Well, first of all," said Blogden, "tell me what you like best?"

"Brandy."

"Then brandy be it! You shall have as much as you like."

The landlord looked at him incredulously.

"You see, I will call for it as if for myself and companions. Your wife will supply it, and I shall pay her; and you can have the pleasure of drinking until you are tired."

The drunkard's eyes gleamed at this prospect, and he licked his parched lips in eager anticipation.

Blogden was as good as his word.

Brandy was called for and brought in, but the manner in which the landlord poured it down his throat was something he was not prepared for.

When a huge quantity had disappeared, without producing, to all appearances, the least effect, he said:

"I don't wonder, old fellow, that your wife should lock up the cellar. Why, hang me! if the sea was brandy, you'd drink it dry, or die in the attempt."

"All right!" said the landlord, thickly. "A drop more—let's have a drop more."

But Blogden refused, for he wished this man to retain his senses sufficiently to enable him to make the bargain with the waggoner when he arrived.

"Leave us now a little while," said Blogden; "I have a little talk I want to have with my companions. You can come back presently, and then we'll have more brandy."

On these conditions the landlord left the room, and soon afterwards a tremendous commotion ensued.

A shrill voice, accompanied by blows, followed.

The officers winked and laughed at each other.

"She's paying him out for it now," said Blogden.

"Well, no matter. You ought all of you to be much obliged to him, for we shall get our prisoner a good way on the road to London without any fatigue at all."

"Yes, it's a capital plan."

This was something Tom King could not help acknowledging, but oh, how he hated the landlord, who had so officiously made this suggestion!

He wished from the very bottom of his heart that he had long since been drowned in one of his ale barrels.

Tom King was, in reality, so disheartened by the failure he had met with that, coming as it did almost in the moment of success, he began in real truth to despair.

Just at this time, it should be mentioned, he looked again into the countenance of Joe Blogden, and was somewhat astonished to perceive that its expression had again changed to its former hungry, rapacious look.

Then, to his unutterable astonishment, he heard the chief officer address his companions as follows:

"My lads," he said, "as we have comfortably settled matters so far, there is something else that I've been thinking of nearly all day that I should like to submit to you, and I believe you will declare at once that it is a capital idea."

The officers crowded round him anxiously, and Blogden continued:

"I want to talk to you about the reward. You know how much it is—five hundred pounds—and we had better settle now beforehand how we intend to divide it, so that there may be no grounds for dissatisfaction in the future."

The men remained silent, but looked at him attentively, wondering what was coming next.

"Five hundred pounds is the amount," said Blogden; "and if you will count, you will find, including myself, there are just ten of us; so, if equally divided, that makes exactly fifty pounds apiece—does it not?"

"It does—you are quite right."

"Well, now, it strikes me that for all our trouble that's a very paltry and inadequate remuneration; so I have a proposal to make by which it can be made better worth our while."

"How so—how so?"

The men were eager, yet scarcely more eager than Tom King, who listened with a truly wonderful amount of interest to this conversation, which was something altogether different to what he had expected to hear.

"Now," said Blogden, "if the chief part of this sum could come to the share of one of us, why, then it would be a very good thing indeed for the lucky individual, and the others would not be so very badly off."

"But we don't understand."

"I will explain," said Blogden, whose fingers and mouth worked convulsively, while his features seemed to grow sharper and sharper. "It can be done in this way: We will draw lots for the prisoner—throw for him—rattle him—or decide it in what way you like. For instance, we all know how to rattle a dice-box—let that way settle it."

"But we don't understand," interrupted the officers.

"You will in a moment. Let us take fifty pounds from the whole amount—that will leave four hundred and fifty, will it not?"

"It will."

"Well, then, let the one who gets the greatest number of points be entitled to receive four hundred and fifty

ounds, and let the remaining fifty be equally divided among the rest, by which means you see that there is a certainty of all of you making a very tolerable day's work, and there's the chance of one of us earning something worth our while to receive."

Blogden ceased, and watched, with eyes like those of a culture, the countenances of his companions.

He was filled with anxiety to know how this would be received.

He was himself an inveterate gamester, and he was aware that those who were with him often passed away an idle hour or two with either cards or dice.

He soon found opinion rather divided amongst them, though it was plain to see there was not one who was not willing to take the chance of securing so large a sum.

"Take a hundred pounds from the chief amount," said one, and let that be equally divided among the losers, and let the principal amount be four hundred pounds instead of four hundred and fifty."

"I have no objection," said Blogden, "if that is more agreeable to you, and should we decide upon it, why, it will be the means of passing the time very pleasantly until the waggon arrives."

For the life of them the men could not resist the temptation to gamble.

They had already become sufficiently votaries of the vice to be infatuated with it, when Blogden cleverly produced from his pocket a dice-box, and dropped a couple of the spotted ivory cubes within it and rattled them.

Whatever scruples or hesitations may have remained in any of their breasts were banished.

Their eyes gleamed wildly with excitement, as they drew their chairs up closely around the table.

"Three throws shall decide it," said Blogden—"three throws each, and if there are any ties, three throws again."

This being agreed to, the dice were thrown for the first time by Blogden himself.

The others followed, and when all were done it was found oddly enough that four had thrown and obtained precisely the same number.

"Then you stand out," said Blogden, in a husky voice. "The matter will soon be decided now."

But again ties were thrown, and Blogden found that the chance rested between himself and the man who had proposed the alteration in the division of the amount.

The box was rattled, the dice thrown, then, with wild shriek of triumph, Blogden announced himself the victor.

"Mine," he screamed—"mine! The money is mine! The hundred pounds will be divided among you!"

His associates shrunk back, and their countenances assumed a sullen, angry look.

Blogden observed it.

"It's no good grumbling now," he cried, "the bargain is made, and cannot be altered. I hoped that fortune would favor me, yet scarcely dared think it. However, I will behave handsomely to you. We'll have wine all round—that is, if such a thing can be found in the cellars—wine for all of us!"

He rose to go to the bar, and as soon as the door closed behind him his comrades whispered eagerly together for a few seconds.

Then the one who had been so close to winning rose also, and followed Blogden from the room.

What was his errand, Tom King could not guess.

He stretched his ears to the fullest extent in the hope of overhearing what the officers whispered among themselves.

But they spoke in such tones that he was unable to do so.

Nevertheless, he found all these different proceedings very distracting to him, while they annoyed him beyond measure, for he could not help taking notice of all that was going on around, and the events were so strange and varied that they prevented that amount of concentration of ideas necessary for devising some plan of escape.

The officers continued to whisper energetically until Blogden reappeared.

He was followed by the landlady, who was speaking to him in shrill, angry tones.

"I will send down in the cellar for what you want," she said. "But, mark this, not another drop more do you have afterwards! I will take care that you never enter my doors again!"

"I have no wish to return," said Blogden; "but then wine we must and will have! It will soon be seven o'clock, and as soon as the waggon comes up let us know, for we are going by it."

Blogden sat down, and, glancing around, immediately detected the absence of one of his companions.

"Hallo!" he said, "where's Cribbs?"

The officers preserved their countenances tolerably well, and one said, in a tone of indifference:

"He followed you from the room. I thought he would have been back before this."

"Mr. Blogden," said Tom King, "I wish to know how much longer you intend to keep me in this position? My limbs are all so cramped, that I suffer intense pain from head to foot. The circulation of the blood is completely stopped. Surely it is base and ungenerous to treat a prisoner in this manner?"

"It is your own fault," growled Blogden—"quite your own fault! If you had given me your promise you might have taken it easy."

"But that was what I did not feel inclined to do, and which I still refuse."

"Very well, then," said Blogden, "hold your row! You're worth four hundred pounds to me, and I'll take d—d good care that I never lose sight of you until you are safely under the roof of Newgate!"

"We shall see," said Tom King, quietly. "I believe there is such a thing as people being too clever."

"Aha! no doubt," chuckled Blogden—"no doubt—no doubt!"

It was while this conversation was going on between the leader of the officers and the prisoner, that the man who had been called Cribbs returned, and slipped quietly into his seat, exchanging, as he did so, a glance of peculiar intelligence with his comrades, unseen, of course, by Blogden, who had his back turned towards them.

CHAPTER CMLXV.

AFFAIRS AT THE INN TAKE A MOST EXTRAORDINARY AND UNEXPECTED TURN.

DIRECTLY afterwards the door of the room was thrown open by the landlady, who stood on one side in order to allow some one else to enter.

Being interested in everything that took place, Tom King languidly turned his eyes in this direction. He would have turned his head, but this was impossible, owing to the tightness of his bonds.

Then he saw enter the room a person he had not yet seen at the inn.

This man was dressed half like an ostler, half like a general servant, and in front of him he carried a kind of tray, on which several bottles of wine were laid.

Directly Tom King caught sight of this man's face he felt perfectly sure that he had seen him somewhere before, but in what place, or under what conditions, his brain was then too much harassed and perplexed to allow him to remember.

"Here you are, gentlemen," he said, as he set the tray down on the table. "Prime, this 'ere is, and no mistake! I ought to know, 'cause I've fetched it out of the cellars."

"Then," said Blogden, who was inclined to be particularly liberal, "as you are a decent sort of a chap, I don't mind asking you to join us in a glass."

"Well, sir, I don't know as I should mind; but——"

"Jack," said his mistress, in her usual shrill, angry tones, "do you know what you are saying? Do you know I am here? Leave the room this moment!"

Very much in the manner of a kicked cur, Jack sneaked out of the room.

The landlady stalked after him, and closed the door.

"There's a nice better half for a man to have!" said Blogden. "Thank goodness she's not Mrs. B! Now, then, my lady," he said, "we'll drink this nice little drop of wine. You see I have ordered a bottle a-piece for us, and then we shall be in good trim for our journey."

It is worthy of remark that, no sooner were these words spoken than the officers all sprang to their feet,

and each one seized hold of a bottle, leaving one on the tray, which, of course, fell to Blogden's share.

Tom King thought this circumstance peculiar; but Blogden evidently took no notice of it, for he picked up the bottle, and taking the corkscrew that was beside it, quickly tapped it.

"Now, my lads," he said, "follow my example. We must manage to get through this little business before the waggon comes. I am told we may expect it here in rather more than half an hour."

The other officers willingly enough drew forth the corks, then each simultaneously, or nearly so, poured himself out a glass.

"A toast," said Blogden—"a toast. Here's good luck to the winner!"

The glasses were drained.

The officers exchanged glances.

"Upon my word," said Blogden, "it's good! It's many a day since I tasted wine, or you either, very likely. I should take this to be a good old sort. It tastes as though it had been down in the cellar a very long while."

The glasses were quickly filled and emptied, then, for the third time, the wine was poured out, but on this occasion the glasses were allowed to stand before them on the table.

"It's d—d odd," said Blogden, after a pause, "but I can't think what's the matter with my head. That must be uncommonly strong wine, or else it's mixed with the ale. Ah! that's it—a mixture don't agree."

He carried his hand to his forehead while he spoke.

The other officers seemed to be to a considerable extent under the influence of the wine, for they one and all complained of the feeling they had in their heads.

It was rather odd, but every one placed his hand to his forehead, and then, leaning forward, allowed his elbow to rest on the table, so that they were all very nearly in the same position.

Some time elapsed, but not a word was spoken, nor did one move.

Tom King was overcome with astonishment.

Then he began to grow alarmed, and finally hopeful.

Yet he fancied that perhaps this was, after all, only a scheme to annoy him; perhaps they were pretending to be overcome by drink in order that they might have the pleasure of witnessing his struggles to get free.

This consideration kept Tom King for some time quite still, but at last he muttered:

"They are drunk—dead drunk, every one of them; it must be, I suppose, the mixture of the ale and wine, and yet I should have thought their constitutions strong enough to stand anything. Now, curses on it if I had not made that other futile attempt, I could get free! It is impossible now—quite impossible."

Nevertheless, Tom King tugged away at the ropes, but all the effect he produced was to cut his wrists and arms severely.

All at once he stopped, for he heard a strange, faint tapping sound.

He looked up at once in the direction from which he imagined the sound had come.

Evening was now drawing on apace, and already the room in which the officers were seated was plunged in considerable obscurity.

The darkness had, however, come on so gradually that Tom scarcely noticed it until the present moment.

He looked about him then and saw nothing.

The tapping was repeated.

This time he felt certain that it came from the window.

He looked keenly, and then saw the face of a man.

For a moment a wild idea that he was about to be rescued came over him; but immediately afterwards he dismissed it as absurd.

Nevertheless, with perfect fascination, he fixed his eyes upon the face at the window.

He saw it move.

An arm was raised, and then the casement was slowly and cautiously opened.

The intruder listened for a few seconds, and when he heard the loud and deep snores proceeding from the sleeping officers, he seemed to nod his head with satisfaction.

Then, stepping lightly into the room, he stood on tip-toe

past the table, and paused close to the plank to which Tom King was bound.

"Hush—quiet!" he said. "Are you all right?"

"Scarcely," said Tom. "But who are you?"

"Never mind just at present. Keep quiet while I untie these knots."

"You could not perform a more welcome service. But how is it that you, a perfect stranger, are willing to do this for me?"

"Ah! captain," said the man, almost with a sigh, "I find you have forgotten me, and it is as well for you to-day that my memory is not so short."

"I fancied I had seen you before," returned Tom, "but I behold so many faces, and it is hard to recollect every one."

"No doubt. Quiet—lie there; that knot is untied. Well, once upon a time you dealt liberally and kindly by me, and I am not the one to forget it. But I will explain more in a little while. How do you feel now?"

"Better I think—better!" said Tom, faintly.

The fact was, the loosening of the ropes removed the impediments to the free circulation of the blood, and this being done somewhat suddenly caused a dreadful feeling of sickness and faintness to come over the highwayman.

But Jack, the ostler, resolutely went on untying the knots, and really it was something wonderful to see the manner in which they came undone beneath the skill of his nimble fingers.

"There, captain," he said at last, "you are free. Hullo! though, that won't do!"

Tom King had endeavored to rise, but he failed.

His brain turned giddy, and he fell forward, and would have reached the ground heavily had not the ostler stretched out his arm and saved him.

"Gently—gently!" he said. "Just take hold of me round the neck, will you, and I will carry you out into the fresh air."

Tom had sufficient sense remaining to comply with this demand.

Accordingly, he clasped his arms round the ostler's neck, and that individual, by an exertion of the great strength he possessed, hoisted him on to his back and carried him across the room, through the window, and into the yard.

"There, captain!" he said. "Just keep your feet half a moment, while I shut the window. There, that's it—capital! Now come along with me."

Once again picking him up in a similar fashion, the ostler carried the almost insensible form of Tom King across the yard to the stable.

As soon as he was inside, he shook Tom roughly.

"Now, captain," he said, "you must rouse yourself up. The next thing you have to do is to climb up yonder ladder. I would carry you up if I could, but it's rather too much for my strength. You go first, and I will keep behind you."

Tom was anxious indeed to make his escape, and his faculties were in just such a condition as to make him willing to obey the commands of anyone who spoke to him.

Up the ladder he accordingly with great difficulty managed to climb.

Reaching the top, he found himself in a rather spacious hay-loft.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "there's plenty of fresh, clean straw, and hay too, and all you have to do is to lie down on it, roll yourself in it, and you are safe for some time to come. Stretch yourself out, and have a good rest. I will answer for it the officers will not trouble you just yet."

Tom King did as he was told, but he had not assumed a recumbent position many minutes before he felt the benefit of doing so.

The blood, working more equally, circulated, and the dreadful aching in his limbs to some extent subsided.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "just a wee drop of brandy—a wee drop, mind—will be the best thing you can have, and after that something to eat."

Almost mechanically Tom swallowed not much more than a table-spoonful of brandy, which the ostler gave him from a small bottle he produced from his pocket.

Tom's curiosity was greatly raised by the mysterious turn events had taken.

"Never mind me," replied the ostler to some of his



[DICK TURPIN ATTACKS THE CONSTABLE.]

inquiries—"I am your friend—let that be sufficient. I can tell you something much more interesting and to the purpose."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, don't you think it odd that the officers should all have dropped off dead drunk so soon after having in the wine?"

"Very strange indeed!" said Tom.

"Well, I'll tell you the whole truth about it, captain. I was sitting in the stable thinking about you, and cudgelling my brains to think of some method by which I could set you at liberty—for you understand, captain," he interrupted, "I recognised you at once, and determined to do what I could for you."

"I am much obliged."

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"Well, go on, you were saying you were sitting in the stable."

No. 200.—BLACK BESS.

"Yes, I was; that was after Mr. Blogden, as they call him, made master dead drunk. My eye, what a rage the missis was in to be sure! However, I carried him up to bed, and he was all the time muttering something about the waggon."

"Yes," said Tom, "it was arranged that when the carrier's waggon passed I should be placed in it along with some of the officers."

The ostler nodded.

"I heard about the kind of raffle they had for you," he went on, "and was thinking perhaps that might be turned to your advantage, when all of a sudden who should come into the stable but one of the officers. He took a crown piece from his pocket and slipped it into my hand, as he said:

"Jack, my lad, I have an important service I want you to render me, and if you do it well you shall have four times that amount for your reward."

"Of course I wanted to know what the officer wanted."

"Well," he said, "you must know we have thrown dice for the prisoner, and all the reward is going to be taken by Blogden. Well, we don't believe he played fair for it, and so want to pay him off in his own coin. Now, I daresay about the premises you have got some kind of sleeping drug or other—I mean such stuff as you would mix with the ale."

"Oh, yes," I answered, with a wink. "I see you know all the tricks of the trade."

"I was in the public line myself once," this officer said, and then he told me to draw the cork out of one of the bottles of wine, and pop enough of this drug into it to cause anyone to become insensible after drinking a couple of glasses or so.

"I promised, and just then the missis called me to go down into the cellar and fetch up the wine, so, you see, everything favored me."

Tom King listened to these revelations with the utmost amazement.

"Well, captain," said the ostler, "I saw this—that all was plain and straightforward—that I could set you free without any trouble at all, besides which I could play the officers a very good trick. So what do you think I did? Why, I drew the corks of every one of the bottles as fast as I could, and poured enough of the stuff into each; then corked them up again."

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated Tom. "I should almost have said incredible, only what has happened fully confirms all you have stated."

"Yes, captain, it's true—quite true."

"But how comes it," added Tom, "that the officers did not notice that the corks had been previously drawn?"

"Ah, captain, I see you don't know any of the tricks of the trade. Why, there's a corkscrew down in the cellar—a hair corkscrew, they call it—with wires almost as fine as a hair, and yet strong enough to draw out a cork. When it is done the cork can be put back again, and the hole that is left is so small that no one could find it unless they guessed it was there and searched very narrowly for it."

"That accounts for it at once," said Tom King. "But I feel that I shall never be able to thank you enough or to do sufficient to show you how much I appreciate the service you have rendered me. But fear nothing. You shall not go unrewarded—I will take care of that! I shall always remember that I owe you my life."

"There—there, captain, that will do—I don't want any more of that! I consider that what I did just serves the officers right. It's a case of the biter bit."

"Well, but how shall you proceed?" said Tom—"what's the next move?"

"Well, captain, that I leave to you. I thought, perhaps, you might be able to jump on to the back of your horse, and gallop off, but I sadly fear you are too weak and exhausted for anything of that kind."

"I don't think so," said Tom, and immediately he made an effort to rise to his feet.

He quickly found he had miscalculated his strength entirely.

He swayed to and fro for a moment, then fell back on to the mass of hay and straw.

CHAPTER CMLXVI.

IN WHICH TOM KING HAS AN AMPLE REVENGE UPON THE POLICE OFFICERS.

"There you go, captain," said the ostler. "I knew just how it would be. You are clean done up, and no wonder; and what's more, if you are able to move for the next day or two, it's an odd thing to me."

"Then," said Tom King, "I am as good as a dead man already, for I must get away from the inn before the officers recover their senses."

"Yes, yes," said the ostler—"either you must go or the officers. Yes, yes—that's quite right."

"What do you mean?" said Tom. "Do you for a moment suppose the officers will leave without making a rigid search of the premises?"

"Yes," said the ostler, "I think it very likely they will."

"But how long will it be before they recover from the effects of the drug?"

"Some hours, captain—I gave it 'em strong."

"Well, then, I have that much rest before me."

"So you have. But, captain, I've made my mind up for one thing."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, that you can't go away from the inn and ensure your safety that way. The officers must go instead, leaving you here snug and comfortable."

"You would be a clever man, Jack, if you could manage that."

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me nothing would be easier."

"You are jesting."

"Not a bit, captain. Of course I needn't tell you what the officers hoped to do was to leave Blogden here, overpowered by the drug, while they took you in the waggon to London."

"Yes, that was their intention, simply because he had won the greatest share of the reward."

"Well, perhaps you know how it was arranged for the waggon to be made use of?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"But," said Jack, very impressively, "that particular arrangement was made with master, and now he's lying on the bed upstairs as drunk as a pig, and it's a question who will recover possession of their senses first, he or the police officers."

"Well, but I can't see what you are driving at."

"Oh," said the ostler, with a twinkle in his eye, "it will be the richest joke that ever was heard of in this world! I will tell you, captain: When the waggon goes by, of course it will stop here—it always does; then I shall tell the driver that a party of gentlemen have stopped here, and, being overcome by liquor, wanted to ride back in his waggon to London."

"But the landlady," objected Tom—"she will tell him all."

"Not so," said Jack. "I will try to keep her out of the way if I can. And then, I must tell you that she hates the sight of these officers, simply because they have made her husband so drunk. Won't it be a good joke, captain? Can't you fancy what a lark it will be to carry those clever gentlemen one by one, and lay them down in the straw at the bottom of the waggon? Then away they will go, and ten to one if they wake up much before they reach London."

In spite of the pain he suffered, and the perilous nature of his position, Tom King laughed most heartily at this idea.

It was a thought that had never occurred to him.

"If it can be done, Jack—if it can only be done! Yet upon second thoughts, I think I had better endeavor to leave here."

"Why, captain—why?"

"Because discovery of the part you have taken is certain, and the consequences will be serious to you."

"I can't see that, captain—I can't see that at all."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because the officers, being all drunk alike, won't be able to reproach one another, and you may depend that those who are in the secret of drugging Blogden will be careful to hold their tongues. Then when they come back we have only to say that, not properly understanding the arrangement that had been made, and having no means of asking questions, we had done the best we could under the circumstances."

Tom King tried to rise again.

He would infinitely have preferred to leave the inn behind him; but, to his dismay, he actually found that he was more helpless and weak than he had been a short time before.

"You must leave it to me," said the ostler, decisively, "and if you will only let me carry the matter out, rely upon it, it will end quite well. Hark! As I live, I can hear the waggon approaching now. We shall soon know whether we are to be successful in getting rid of the officers or not."

Tom King was close to the opening in the loft, which served as a window, and being in this position, he was able to hear with tolerable distinctness the approach of the waggon.

The tinkling of the bells upon the horses' harness soon

made itself distinctly heard, and then the ostler, after many injunctions to Tom to keep himself well covered with straw, descended the ladder, and made his way to the front of the inn.

It was only with difficulty that he could restrain his exultation and delight within something like reasonable bounds; he was almost bursting with laughter.

He walked straight to the bar where the landlady was standing.

"Missis," he said—"missis!"

"Yes, Jack, what is it?"

"Why, these gentlemen seem to have gone very quiet all at once, don't they?"

"Yes, the drunken wretches!" was the angry reply. "I daresay they are all insensible."

"Very likely," said Jack. "And here comes the waggon."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, they agreed with master to ride in the waggon. Didn't you hear something said about it?"

"Yes, I did hear something; but I'm not going to trouble myself about such beasts; they should look after their own business; I don't intend to look after it for them."

"Well, missis, what shall I do?"

"Do as you like," was the answer. "I am not going to say a word to them, and trouble to wake them up if they're asleep, or ask a single question; I only hope their prisoner escapes."

With these words, the landlady flounced round and passed through the door into another room, where she began working away at a prodigious rate, turning every object topsy-turvy, as was her custom whenever her mind was perturbed.

"That's the ticket!" said the ostler, as he slapped his thigh. "It could not be better; now I can manage it first rate!"

At this moment he walked the waggoner. He knew the ostler at a glance, and nodded to him.

"Just see to my horses, will you, Jack?"

"Oh, yes!" Jack replied. "But, Ben, there's been such a lark here to-day, and ain't the missis just mad, that's all!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the waggoner. "Where's the gaffer?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the ostler. "But wait a bit, I will draw you your jug. Missis has left me to look after the place."

A jug of ale was accordingly drawn, and then the ostler continued:

"Why, Ben, a party of the rummest fellows came here to-day; they look to me like police officers; but, however, they are out for a lark. They got master into the room and made him dead drunk, and now he's upstairs on the bed sleeping it off; and as for the rest of 'em they have guzzled down such a quantity of wine that they are as helpless as logs of wood."

"Well," said Ben, "but what of that?"

"Why," said the ostler, "of course some o' these claps gave in sooner than the rest, and the remainder, knowing that about four were already so far gone as to be unable to ride on horseback, determined to ask you to give them a ride in your waggon. Well, now they're all in the same pickle, and I suppose what they want is to ride all together to London."

"Oh, ah!" said Ben, who probably smelt out something profitable to himself in the undertaking—"that's it, no doubt."

"Well," said Jack, "I should not like to take upon myself to say. Let us go into the room and wake one of them up and ask him."

This was agreed to, and to the room accordingly they went.

Most of the officers were still standing round the table in the position we have described; but some had fallen forward, and two had slipped under the table.

"That seems to be the head man," said the ostler, pointing to Blogden, "because he ordered everything and paid for it, and it was him that made master so awfully drunk. I should think we'd better try to wake him."

"Oh, just as you like!" said the waggoner. "I leave it to you."

Jack shook Blogden furiously for some moments, and

at last was successful in extracting a kind of grumbling sound.

"Sir—sir!" said Jack, putting his lips close to his ear and bawling at the very top of his voice—"sir—sir!"

Another groan came by way of reply.

"The waggon's here!" bawled Jack again—"the waggon's come!"

These words seemed in some confused manner to reach the bewildered intellects of the chief officer, for he opened his eyes, and glared vacantly around him, like one half aroused from deep sleep.

"The waggon? Oh, yes, that's right! Put him in—put him in!"

"I told you that was what he wanted," said Jack to the waggoner.

Joe Blogden fell forward, and struck his head quite a sharp blow on the table, after which he remained perfectly still.

"Well, they're a nice lot," said the waggoner—"a very nice lot. But, however, as my waggon is empty, I may as well take 'em as not; they are sure to give me something for my trouble."

"Oh, yes!" said Jack, with a grin, "I shouldn't wonder if you don't find 'em to be very liberal."

"Come on then," said Ben, nothing loath; "you help me, and we'll carry them into the waggon pretty quick."

Jack put a hand willingly enough.

The officers were one by one taken up and carried by the head and heels out of the inn and placed on the straw at the bottom of the waggon.

Some made a few convulsive movements.

In particular there was one on whom the drug did not seem to have produced so great an effect as the rest, for he opened his eyes to their fullest extent, and in a thick, husky voice, said:

"What's the matter? Where are we going?"

"Into the waggon," said Jack.

"Oh, all right," half-grunted, half-muttered the officer, sleepily, "the waggon, of course—I know—I—"

He lapsed off into silence, and the next moment was lying comfortably by the side of his companions.

When they had all been bestowed, and the waggoner's horse attended to, Jack and Ben returned to the bar to finish their jug, and just then, as fate would have it, the landlady came out of the inner room.

"Good evening," said the waggoner to her. "I've got a rummy load to-night, missis."

"The drunken wretches!" she said, wrathfully. "Have you put them in the waggon?"

"Yes, missis, I have."

"Well, it's more than I would have done for them; they deserve to be every one rolled into a ditch and left there till sober!"

The ale was finished, and as they went away the ostler nudged his friend in the ribs.

"Missis is awfully mad. The old man has not been drunk for months, and she thought she'd got him quite out of it. Won't there be a little bit of a row to-morrow!"

"Very likely," said the waggoner. "I shall most likely be back by about this time to-morrow night, or perhaps by daybreak the next morning."

"All right," said Jack, "and then you can let me know how you have got on with those gents."

"I can; but I say, Jack."

"What?"

"Suppose I was to go all the way to London and they were not to wake up?"

"Well?"

"What should I do then?"

"Well," said Jack, scratching his head with a half-puzzled air, "I scarcely know what to say. I don't mind telling you what I think, and if I do you are not obliged to carry it out."

"Eh! what?" said the waggoner. "I don't understand."

"Yes you do," said the ostler. "I believe these men are officers—judging from their dress, I should say they was, and judging from their actions I should say they wasn't, 'cause it isn't usual for police officers to go about the country getting drunk and riding back to London in a waggon, is it?"

"I never heard of such a thing before," said the waggoner.

"Well, if you should find them helpless when you get there," added Jack, "I should recommend you to drive to Bow Street police station, then you will know more about it. If they are officers, all well and good, and if they are not, why the police will take care of them until they come to their senses."

"That's a very good idea of yours, Jack—what's the proper thing to do," assented the waggoner, "and if in case they don't wake up, that's where I'll take them."

"Very well. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the waggoner, as he climbed up into his lofty seat. "Good-night, Jack, and you may depend on seeing me either to-morrow night or the following morning."

With these words the waggoner smacked his whip loudly and off set his team at a very tolerable rate considering the nature of the load they had behind them.

The ostler stood watching until darkness hid the waggon from his sight; then, unable any longer to restrain his mirth, he leaned up against the gate-post and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and until his sides fairly ached.

"Oh, it's too rich a joke—too rich! Wou't they be mad when they wake up! I fancy I see 'em; I'd give one whole year's wages freely if I could only be invisible in the waggon at the time when they do open their eyes. Why, I shouldn't wonder if they were to get into a rage and set to work fighting each other like so many mad cats. Oh, it's too good! I can't take it all in yet—I feel I can't. But wait a bit—quiet, Jack, quiet; you have got a great deal to do yet, and above all things don't forget the captain."

CHAPTER CMLXVII.

TOM KING MAKES HIMSELF TOLERABLY COMFORTABLE IN THE LOFT.

WHILE Jack, the ostler, muttered these words half-aloud, his countenance by degrees changed from an expression of uncontrollable mirth to one of extreme gravity.

He shook his head once or twice to and fro, from which it may be inferred that he was not altogether blind to the danger and risk he ran by thus aiding and abetting the notorious highwayman.

He made his way at once direct to the stables, and having entered, closed the door.

By the time he had ascended the perpendicular ladder and gained the loft above, his face had resumed its usual cheerful, jolly aspect.

"Hullo!" he said, in a faint voice. "Captain—captain, I've come back; it's all right."

There was no reply.

"What can be the matter?" thought Jack. "Surely he's not gone. No—no; but wait a bit, I'll get a light."

The loft was now so profoundly dark that it was impossible to see from one side of it to the other.

From the stable beneath, however, he produced a lantern, and by the aid of this in searching about he discovered Tom King lying upon the straw very much in the same position as that in which he had left him.

"He's asleep," said Jack.

This was indeed the fact, although at first it may seem strange, even unaccountable, that Tom King could fall off into a slumber in such a place.

But the fact was, his slumber was one produced by his state of utter and complete exhaustion.

He had sunk off to sleep quite unconsciously—in fact, he had almost swooned.

But the ostler satisfied himself that he was sleeping peacefully, and having done so, he turned aside.

"Let him rest," he murmured—"let him rest; he will wake up a fresh man. I'll see that he is perfectly safe."

Jack sat down at once to watch, choosing a position near to the circular window of the loft, which enabled him to hear distinctly all that might take place on side, and, should the moon break forth, would allow him a tolerable view of the country round.

Here, then, he remained patiently on the watch for a long, long time.

It may be that he dozed once or twice, for it was not until there were palpable indications in the east that the coming of the new day was not far distant that a slight sound was heard indicating that Tom King was rousing himself.

Jack turned round at once.

"Well, captain," he said, "I should think you feel better after that little bit of a snooze; do you not?"

Tom King pressed his hands to his head in a bewildered way; he could not understand at first where he was, and was beyond measure puzzled to know what had happened.

By degrees recollection came back to him, and then he sat up in the straw thoroughly awake.

"The officers," he asked, anxiously—"where are the officers? Tell me that!"

With great difficulty the ostler controlled his propensity to indulge in an explosion of laughter; he was only able to succeed by noticing the extreme anxiety with which Tom asked the question.

"They're gone, captain," he said, "don't be alarmed about them in the least—I assure you there is no occasion."

"Gone?" repeated Tom, incredulously.

"Yes. Just wait a moment, and I will tell you all about it."

Jack did so.

Tom King listened with unbounded wonder.

Then, in a grave voice, he asked:

"And do you really mean to say, Jack, that you have had the audacity to do this?"

"The what, captain? I don't know that word; but if you mean have I done it, why, I say yes. Ah! isn't it a good joke?"

"Jack," said Tom King, "it strikes me you will have to pay dearly for it. Where's my horse—I'll be off at once; and if you are wise, you will make yourself scarce as quickly as you can!"

"Gently, captain—gently—not so fast, if you please; I have not told you all yet."

"Indeed! What have you to say?"

"Why, this: I think I shall clear myself very well in the matter; I am not at all alarmed on account of that."

"But," interrupted Tom King, "the officers will be filled with rage when they find how they have been played with, and an immense troop of them will be sent down without delay."

"I'm not so certain of that," was the answer. "In the first place, they had never been this road before; I gathered that from what they said, and it's odd to me if I didn't give them enough of the drug to make them remain fast asleep until they were delivered at Bow Street station. *Delivered!* only just think of that now!"

Jack laughed again, and this time Tom King joined in heartily.

"Well, when they come to themselves," pursued the ostler, "they won't be able to tell just whereabouts this inn really is; they will have an idea of its locality, and very likely will search closely until they find it, but that will take them some time."

"Yes," said Tom King, "that's true enough; I didn't think of that before."

"But I did, captain; and, what's still more to the point, either to-night or early to-morrow morning the waggoner will be passing this way again, and from him I shall learn full particulars, and until then, captain, my advice is that you remain quiet where you are, and get your strength up. Rely upon it you shall not be disturbed."

"Many thanks," said Tom—"many thanks; but I must be moving, and I think I cannot do better than take the opportunity of a parting now."

Jack looked disappointed.

Tom King rose quickly to his feet.

No sooner, however, had he assumed an erect posture than he became all in a moment conscious of the extreme state of weakness he was in.

He reeled and almost fell.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, decidedly, "you must not think of leaving here like that; besides, there is no earthly occasion—take my word for it, you are safe. Just keep still—that's all you have to do."

"But will not this loft be visited?"

"Not by anybody except myself, captain; I have the stables all to myself. I don't think master has been up here since the last lot of hay and straw was brought."

"Then," said Tom, rather faintly, "I will stay; I am not so strong as I should wish to be; besides, I have a wound which, though getting well, gives me much trouble, and—and—"

"What, captain?"

"If you could find me something to eat, and bring it here unknown to everybody——"

"That shall be done, captain; nothing could be easier. You leave that to me; why, I was just about to propose it." Tom came closer towards the circular window, and looked out.

A fair, pleasant enough scene was spread before his gaze—one of those pretty, rural landscapes for which England is so famous, and upon which the eye is never tired of looking.

"You seem very quiet and lonely here," was Tom's remark as he turned away.

"Very quiet. We are not much troubled by customers; they seem to grow fewer and fewer every day, and if trade doesn't alter I shall look out for a fresh place."

"I will tell you what you shall do," said Tom King. "Such a service as you have rendered me shall not go unrewarded; I will take care to supply you with the means to enable you to set up in business yourself."

"Thanks, captain, and then I shall indeed be deeply in your debt, yet I shall hope for the coming of the day when I may be able to repay you."

"There—there, that will do."

"Well, captain, I'm off now—a fresh thought occurs to me."

"What is it?"

"Why, the officers, when they come, will doubtless approach the inn from the direction of London, will they not?"

"Almost certain."

"Well, then, a particular friend and companion of mine is at work in a meadow some little distance off—I say at work, but that's hardly right: I expect to meet him go by the front of the inn every minute."

"Well," said Tom, "what of that?"

"Why, this meadow that he is in is near the top of a hill, and from it you can see for a very long way. He can be trusted, and I will tell him to keep a sharp lookout for police officers. If he sees any he is to come here and let me know."

"That would be doing a good service indeed," answered Tom; "I should feel much more content, because then I should have the chance of escaping."

"Of course you would."

"But are you sure he is to be trusted?"

"I will answer for him, captain."

"That is enough then."

"I'm off. Hark, I can hear him—he always walks along whistling like that."

The sound of some person whistling a very intricate, unmelodious tune could now be heard, accompanied by the tread of a heavy footstep.

Jack descended the ladder precipitately, and carried out his intention.

He also brought Tom King the materials of a rude rosette, of which the highwayman partook heartily.

He was now tolerably at ease in his new quarters, for he trusted to having timely intimation of the police officers' approach.

"Now, captain," said the ostler, "don't you feel wonderfully better?"

"I do indeed."

"Well, then, just let me have a look at the wound you spoke of; no doubt it will be the better for a little bathing and fresh bandaging."

"Yes—yes," said Tom, "it pains me sadly."

His hurt was attended to by the ostler, who acquitted himself of the task in a very creditable manner.

When he had finished, he said:

"Now, captain, if you will only take my advice and condescend to be guided by me you will remain just where you are for a few days. Rest and quiet are the only things you require, and if you have them you will be yourself again."

Tom King felt the full force and truth of these remarks.

He had had enough of adventures during the few preceding days to make him desirous of a short interval of quiet.

He reckoned up the time that was still to elapse before the appointed hour of meeting, and having done so, felt that it would indeed be advantageous if he could remain in his present quarters until the time arrived.

Of this he said nothing to the ostler, who, however, watched the workings of his countenance with some anxiety.

Having at last arrived at a decision, Tom said:

"Well, then, my friend—for you have in good truth proved yourself to be such—I will follow your advice and remain here, unless the officers compel me to change my quarters."

"Don't be afraid of them," said Jack, almost contemptuously, "it will be two or three days before they reach here, I'll warrant."

In such conversation as this, much of the time was whiled away.

The extreme state of weakness to which Tom King was reduced made him require an extra quantity of sleep, and therefore much of the time that would otherwise have hung most heavily upon his hands was passed in the unconsciousness of slumber.

So soon as darkness set in, Jack the ostler, having apprised Tom King of his determination, took up his quarters outside the inn with the intention of watching patiently until his friend the waggoner arrived.

His impatience was great, although, as it turned out, he had to wait for a much less time than he had anticipated.

It was, indeed, rather before midnight that Jack's attentive ears caught the sound of the revolving waggon wheels.

"Now for the news," he ejaculated, rubbing his hands briskly together, and starting up from the horse-trough on which he had been seated—"now for the news. Oh, how I wish I could only have seen the joke out to the end."

At length the waggoner drew up before the inn door.

Jack peered up at him, and fancied that his face had a scared, frightened look.

"Hullo!" he cried, "what's the matter with you? Shain't you get down?"

"Not if I know it," was the emphatic reply.

"Why not—why not?"

"Why not?" echoed the waggoner. "Because I never mean to come near this place again, if I can help it."

"Then why are you here now?"

"Just to warn you."

"Of what?"

"That you will be taken prisoner and transported for life."

"Oh, stuff—rubbish! I know better."

"But just let me tell you that I drove along, never thinking of anything till I got to London."

"And didn't the gentlemen awake?"

"Awake? Not they!"

"What did you do with them, then?"

"Why, I followed your advice, and drove up to Bow Street. The officers were there, and I told them just the facts of the case. They came at once, looked into the waggon, and then burst out into a roar of laughter."

"Very likely," said Jack, rubbing his hands more vigorously than ever. "Go on."

"Well, then they discovered that they were not gentlemen at all, as you had fancied, but really police officers; and what on earth could have induced them to get into that condition and give out such instructions they could not imagine."

"What did they do?"

"Why, they dragged them all out with very little ceremony, and tried quite in vain to wake them up, then they wanted to detain me, for they said it was a suspicious affair altogether, but I took advantage of their indecision and drove off."

"And is that all?" said Jack, in a disappointed tone.

"Not exactly all," was the reply. "You don't know how it worried me, for I was certain there was something in the matter that I did not understand, so I made haste with what I had to do, put up my horses, and then returned on foot to the police office."

"What for?"

"Why, to make inquiries, to be sure!"

"And what did you learn?"

"Why, that the officers had been recovered from their deep sleep, and they had declared that they had captured Tom King, the highwayman, but had been drugged at an inn where they stopped, the people at which had assisted the highwayman to escape."

"Pooh—gammon!" said Jack. "They must have been drunk or dreaming!"

"Well, whether they were or not, their story was believed, let me tell you that, and orders were given that a party of police officers should be sent out at once. The only difficulty they were in was about the situation of the inn, and I heard it said that a reward was offered for the waggoner who had brought them. As it was, they suspected he was an accomplice, and, at all events, he could show them the way to the inn."

"But you got clear off, didn't you?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"Then thank your stars for that. You have had a narrow escape, and, if you had been caught, would have got into trouble."

"I knew that," said the waggoner, sulkily. "I didn't think that you'd be the one to serve me such a trick."

"You shall know more about it some day," said Jack, "and perhaps you won't regret it so much, after all. But are you sure that officers were sent out to find this inn?"

"Quite certain."

"Then thanks for the news; I will make myself scarce, for should they return, they would, in their rage, do I don't know what."

"Very good," said the waggoner, as he cracked his whip and drove off. "Good-bye, Jack Ostler, for may I be blown if ever I stop here again, or take up such a load another time as you supplied me with."

At as fast a rate as his horses would go, the waggoner drove off, leaving Jack standing outside the inn, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or be serious.

CHAPTER CMLXVIII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE THE OSTLER'S FRIEND A PRISONER.

THIS intelligence was duly transmitted to Tom King, who, upon hearing it, decided at once to make a move.

But he was overruled by the ostler, who assured him that he would have plenty of warning of the officers' approach.

And indeed, when the night passed away and the next morning dawned without anything of an alarming or unusual character having occurred, Tom King began to feel that in all probability he should be safer where he was than elsewhere.

That day and the following also passed away in quiet.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the officers, which, if the information given by the waggoner was correct, seemed strange indeed.

But the fact was the officers, when they had recovered from their stupor, could give only a very vague and indefinite idea of the situation of the inn whereat they had been so hounded.

They knew that it was somewhere on the cross-road branching out of the highway, but there were many such, and it was impossible to say which was the right one.

Much time, then, was spent in vainly searching for the inn—unnecessarily spent, indeed, for the better plan would have been to go round to the inn where they had first halted with their prisoner, and from which they would have no difficulty in finding their way.

But this was many miles off; and the man to whom the command of the expedition had been entrusted was about the most obstinate, pig-headed officer that ever breathed.

He had made up his mind to conduct the search in a certain way, and nothing on earth could turn him from it.

At last, however, after going many miles, they came into an ill-kept, unfrequented road, which struck Blogden and his companions as being somewhat familiar to them.

"This is the place, I do believe," he exclaimed. "I fancy, if we ascend to the summit of yonder hill, we shall be able to command such a view as will decide the matter one way or the other."

This was agreed upon; but before they had ascended half-way, the eyes of the chief officer caught sight of the figure of a man running hastily across a large, open meadow

He pointed him out to his companions, and then Blogden exclaimed:

"I will lay my life we are on the right track. That fellow has been put there as a scout; he will give warning of our approach."

"Not if I can help it," said the chief officer. "Let those who have the best horses gallop at full speed in pursuit of him, capture him, and bring him back to me."

Several officers pressed forward at once, but there was one who, by the superiority of his steed, rapidly out-distanced his companions.

The man in the field had by this time gauged the cross-road

He heard the clatter of horses' feet behind him, and looked back.

The officer called to him to stop; but, paying no heed to him, he began to run more swiftly than before.

This man, as the reader must already be aware, was the one selected by Jack the ostler to give warning of the coming of the officers.

It was not long, however, before he discovered that, let him run as fast as he might, he had no chance of getting away from the well-mounted police officer.

Paunting and breathless, at last he stopped, and the very next moment the officer was upon him.

With great suddenness and precipitation, he seized hold of him, and, in spite of all his struggles and entreaties to be set at liberty, he was dragged back to the remainder of the troop, who had followed on at a tolerably brisk pace.

"Now, then, rascal," said the chief officer, "confess where you were running to! If you refuse, or if you hesitate, or tell a lie, you shall be made a prisoner, and afterwards transported for life!"

This was a threat that alarmed the country laborer greatly.

His cheeks grew white, and his knees knocked together.

"Speak, villain!" roared the chief officer again—"speak!—tell me what you were about to do!"

In broken, incoherent sentences, this man told the officers all that had passed between the ostler and himself.

He was called upon by Blogden to give a particular description of Jack.

He complied to the best of his ability, and Blogden exclaimed:

"We're right! I recognise the villain now! He brought in the tray of wine! No doubt he has got Tom King in concealment somewhere!"

Upon receipt of this opinion, the officers all pushed forward with fresh vigor, and the unhappy laborer had the mortification of finding himself made a secure prisoner.

He had fancied that by confessing he should get himself out of his scrape.

Had he foreseen the result he would never have spoken.

"All that remains now," said the chief officer, "is for us to approach this inn with due caution, and surround it. We will take prisoners everybody we find there!"

No voice dissented to this arrangement.

By some strange ill-luck, neither Jack the ostler nor Tom King was looking out at this time.

They relied altogether upon the laborer, and the length of time they had remained undisturbed made them careless.

It would have gone hard with them, beyond all doubt, had not a voice suddenly exclaimed:

"Jack—Jack, you idle rascal, where are you? Can't you hear customers are coming? Make haste, will you?"

The voice came from the yard below, and the voice was that of the innkeeper, who had by chance seen a portion of the police officers riding towards his house.

Jack came at once to the little circular window in the loft that we have so often mentioned, and no sooner did he peep out of it than he caught sight of the officers, scarcely more than two hundred yards distant.

He gave a low whistle of alarm, and then, in a voice of tolerable composure, said:

"All right, master, I will be down in a moment."

The landlord at once made his way to the front of the inn, there to be in readiness to receive his guests upon their arrival.

"Captain," said Jack, in a whisper, "they're here!"
 "Then," ejaculated Tom, starting to his feet, "we're betrayed!"

"I fear so; but whether we are or not, we must be off quickly. Your horse is already saddled in the stable below, and I have been at some pains to pick out the best from among those left by the officers. I told you I should have to leave the inn, and I shall do so more unexpectedly than I at all thought for."

While the ostler was uttering these words, Tom looked carefully to his firearms, which during the long rest of leisure he had had he had got into proper order.

A glance almost was sufficient to satisfy him that they were right, and as he restored them to his belt, in readiness for instant use, the ostler said:

"Now, captain, down the ladder as quick as you can, and in less than a moment we shall show them a clean pair of heels."

Tom did not reply, but descended the ladder very speedily.

With the utmost rapidity the ostler brought the two horses out.

They were both in excellent condition, and seemed impatient for a long gallop.

"Now," said Jack, "just look here, captain—I can put you up to a wrinkle. The officers will come direct to the stables, no doubt, so we'll bolt and bar the door—that's it!"

"But how are we to get out?" asked Tom. "Be quick—every second is of importance!"

"I know that, captain. Lead your horse after mine through this narrow door; they will follow you, never fear, for this is where the corn is kept."

Tom complied, and found himself in another compartment of the shed.

"Woa—gently now—stand still!" said the ostler to his horse, patting it upon the neck; then, letting go the bridle, he went to one side of the shed where the planks seemed loose and rotten.

Pressing his shoulder firmly against it, the whole mass gave way, leaving an opening quite large enough to allow them to pass through.

"There, captain, I thought that might be useful, so the other day I took the precaution of loosening all the planks. Quick, and we shall be off!"

The ostler led his horse through the opening, and bounded at once into the saddle.

As he did so, he uttered a cry of warning.

Tom mounted hastily, and drew a pistol.

Then he saw there were some police officers not many paces off, who were coming towards them with all speed, uttering loud shouts and cries.

"They mean having us, captain," cried the ostler, "for it seems they were trying to surround the place! But spur your horse well; he can go if he likes! I'll warrant that there's not a horse among all that lot that could come near it!"

This advice was scarcely needed.

Tom allowed the reins to fall loose upon his horse's neck, and at the first touch of the spur the gallant creature went bounding off at a tremendous gallop.

Jack the ostler had no little difficulty in keeping up with him.

The officers were quickly distanced, but it was daylight—a most unfortunate circumstance for Tom, since it enabled the officers to watch his proceedings at a great distance.

"Gently, captain!" cried the ostler. "I know you don't want me with you, and therefore, if you like, we will part now. That will divide the officers."

"No, no," said Tom, "you had better keep with me, under my protection."

"Thank you, captain, but I can shift for myself."

"I can readily believe that, yet I don't wish to desert you."

"It is no desertion, captain—none at all."

"But, then," asked Tom, "when are we to meet again, for, remember, I am under a deep debt of obligation to you, and I shall not rest until it is paid."

"Anywhere—any time, captain," was the reply. "So far from thinking there is any obligation, I am inclined to cry quits. But there's no time now for talk. Farewell! and, some day or other, I trust we shall meet again."

With these words, the ostler struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks.

The animal uttered a cry of pain, and the next moment was flying at full gallop over the meadows to the right.

Tom King chose the opposite direction, urging his horse onward to the utmost.

The police officers still came perseveringly enough in the rear, but it was evident that their horses were already so much fatigued by the distance they had journeyed that it was impossible to urge them into a rate of speed at all approaching that at which the highwayman's horse was going.

Although aware of this, Tom King's anxiety was considerable; but when he looked around and saw thick, dark clouds piling themselves up, giving token that darkness would set in much earlier than usual, he felt fresh confidence.

Directly afterwards he gained a cross-road.

He pursued it without hesitation, and as it wound about in a serpentine fashion, he was very quickly out of sight of the officers, for on each side a tall, thick hedge-row had been planted.

The chief thing he had to fear was a reinforcement, and that was scarcely likely to take place in so lonely a part of the country.

CHAPTER CMLXIX.

IN WHICH TYBURN FOLL-GATE COMES TO AN END.

WE go back now to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

It will be remembered that we left them riding at full gallop from the ruined castle wherein they had found so strange and secure a place of refuge.

The night was, in good truth, a most disagreeable and unpleasant one to be abroad in, yet the highwaymen found nothing to grumble at in it.

As a measure of prudence they did not attempt to draw rein upon any of the numerous roads which they crossed on their way from the castle, for they were exceedingly desirous that there should be no suspicion of their presence in that part of the country.

At length, however, Claude Duval cried out rather sharply:

"Halt!"

Sixteen-String Jack drew rein at once.

They were now upon a broad high-road, which they had gained by overlapping the hedge that divided it from a meadow.

"What's the matter, Claude?" he asked.

"Why, I fancy we have come quite far enough now. Surely there can be no risk in lying in wait in this place."

"Not much, I should think."

"Then," he continued, "we have arrived just in the nick of time, for I can hear a horse's hoofs quite distinctly."

"You're right," said Jack, after listening for a moment; "a single horseman is coming, though I don't think he will turn out much good."

"Why not?"

"Because his horse is a poor one, or it would never come at such a shuffling trot as that."

"Well, we shall see. Draw back into the shadow."

This was done, and directly afterwards, on looking down the road, they perceived, quite distinctly, something white, which, on a closer approach, turned out to be a white horse.

On this was seated a man, who was amusing himself by every now and then breaking out into a rude ditty.

As soon as he was near enough, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude both rode out.

"Stop!" they cried, as with one voice—"stop! Pull up! If you refuse, your death is certain!"

They presented their pistols while they thus spoke.

"Bedad thin," said a voice, which unmistakably proclaimed its owner to be an Irishman—"bedad thin, I'll be after pulling up, for I'm not tired of my life just yet."

He stopped his horse with the greatest amount of coolness in the world.

"Now," said Claude, sharply, "be quick—we're in a hurry—hand over all the money you have about you!"

"Oh! thin it's highwaymen ye are, is it? Well, thin, divil a ha'penny will ye git out of me!"

"We shall see!" said Jack. "If you don't think proper to hand over quietly, we shall take by force what we require."

"Oh! shall ye now? Thin I'd be obleeged if you'd take as much money as ye could out of me pockets and give me a little back again, for it's none at all I can find there."

"None at all?"

"Divil a ha'penny, barring one crown-piece, and that I spint at the inn buyant, and where any more is to be from I don't know."

There was something in the man's careless tones and in the indifferent manner in which he treated the whole of the proceedings that impressed upon the highwaymen the belief he was speaking nothing but the truth.

"Then, if that's the case," said Claude, angrily, "ride on! Only take this caution with you: if you meet any body, don't say a word about us."

"Fakes, thin, I won't, if you will make me a promise in return. Of course you know where this road leads to."

"Yes, to London."

"Shure, man, you're right. Now jist take notice. If anyone should ax you for Patrick McGear—that's me, ye know—just say you saw me on the high-road, travelling straight for Oxford—do you understand that?—and I'll be obleeged to you."

With these words, the Irishman jogged on again, taking the road to London.

The highwaymen both laughed, in spite of themselves, though they were annoyed that the adventure should turn out so unprofitable, because the probability was the Irishman would ere long make some one acquainted with their presence on the road.

They had no time to exchange any words on the subject, however, for just then they distinctly heard the rattle of wheels.

"A light cart," said Claude Duval, listening attentively.

"Now this, let me tell you, promises us a much better booty."

The sharp stroke of a horse's hoofs upon the hard road now became distinctly audible above the rattle of the wheels, and it was evident that the occupants of the cart were rolling over the road in capital style.

The highwaymen shrunk back again to their place of concealment, and, shading their eyes with their hands, strove to make out who was approaching.

Ere long they discovered that the cart was occupied only by one man, though he had as much superabundant flesh as to be big enough for two, and was in himself quite a big load for a horse.

"That's a farmer, or grazier, or something of that kind," said Claude. "And if he is on his way to market—and there's no doubt that he is—we shall have a profitable adventure. Keep quiet, and, if we both ride out suddenly, we shall, ten to one, frighten him out of his wits."

"If we frighten him out of his money," rejoined his companion, "that will be much more satisfactory."

The highwaymen were silent, for the cart was now very close at hand.

So soon as the horse's head was opposite to them, the highwaymen both pounced out.

Claude Duval seized the horse by the bridle, and forcibly brought him to a standstill, while Sixteen-String Jack presented a pistol at the farmer's head.

"Now, then," he cried, "your money—give it quickly, or I will find whether you are in the habit of carrying your brains in your skull or not!"

This was a threat that horrified the occupant of the cart in no slight degree.

The reins and whip dropped from his nerveless fingers.

"Spare me!" he ejaculated—"spare me! Pray, gentlemen, do not take my life!"

Beyond doubt he would have gone down on his knees in an attitude of supplication, only the shape of the vehicle was such as to make this an impossibility.

"You are all right," said Jack—"no harm will happen to you if you give up your money-bags quietly."

With a deep groan the farmer unbuttoned his huge overcoat and thrust his hand into an inner pocket.

It lingered there for a moment or so hesitatingly.

Jack had his eyes keenly fixed upon him.

"Come," he said, "no delay—time is pressing!"

With another heavy groan the farmer withdrew his hand from his pocket, bringing with it a good-sized bag.

Evidently, however, he could not make up his mind to part with it so easily, although in such a state of mortal fright.

But Jack saved him any further indecision by suddenly snatching it from him.

"There," he said, "that will do; and as the purse is tolerably weighty we will trouble you no further. Here, take the reins, drive off, and be thankful you have escaped with your life."

The farmer did not require a second bidding.

With the utmost alacrity he snatched up the reins and gave the horse a heavy slash with the whip.

He was quickly out of sight in the darkness, and as Jack tossed the purse up in the air and caught it again, he cried:

"It's heavy—very heavy—just enough for what we require."

"Then," said Claude, "if that's the case we cannot do better than ride direct to the toll-gate; I shall be glad to have that little business over."

"Agreed; I have not the least objection."

"Forward, then; we have but to follow this high-road and we shall reach it in a short time."

No more was said by either of the highwaymen, for the speed at which they were going was such as to make conversation a matter of difficulty.

After a hard gallop, they at length came in sight of the toll-gate.

Reducing their speed, they approached with a certain amount of caution, and it was fortunate indeed that they did so.

Suddenly, from out of the shade at the side of the road, about two hundred yards from the toll-gate, a man sprang.

Claude's horse reared and swerved, nearly unseating his rider.

"Captains—captains!" said a voice. "Is it you?"

"Who speaks?" asked Jack.

"Do you not remember my voice? I am the toll-keeper."

"Yes—yes, I recognise you now. Why are you here?"

"To give you warning," was the answer. "Do not linger here a single moment—pray do not!"

"Why not? What has happened?"

"Why, you see, they have turned me out of my situation. In fact, I have been taken up before the magistrate, and only escaped by the greatest wonder in the world. But there is not time to enter into particulars now—some other time must suffice."

"Well," said Jack, "I am glad we have met. Here's what I promised you."

"Thanks, captain, the amount comes most welcome. And now I will tell you why I have been so anxious to waylay you here."

"What is it?"

"Why, the police officers have gone to work very cunningly. One of them has taken my place at the toll-gate. He dresses just like me, and inside are a lot of his companions."

"Then they must have got scent of our intention to return," said Claude.

"It looks like it," was the reply, "though I can't make out how they can have guessed it; nevertheless, they are there, and if you had galloped up to the gate you would both have been shot down or else captured—there was a certainty of one or the other."

"It seems, then," said Jack, "that we are indebted to you for our lives on this occasion."

"Yes, gentlemen, and I am indebted to you for this money, which will make me independent for the rest of my life. But hark!" he ejaculated. "Quick—quick! Be off—they'll see us in another moment, they will be in full pursuit."

The highwaymen looked towards the toll-gate while the man spoke, and then they caught sight of a dark-looking mass, evidently a troop of police officers.

"We can save ourselves easily," said Jack; "but how about yourself—how shall you fare?"

"Don't trouble yourself about me," was the answer.



[DICK TURPIN, IN HIS DISGUISE, VISITS A BARBER'S SHOP.]

"I have arranged all my plans very nicely. Do you see that little bit of a glimmering yonder?"

The man pointed to one side of the road, where, in the darkness, something that looked like a bright red spark could be seen.

"Yes—what of it?"

"Why, I shall wait till the officers start, and then with that slow-match I shall touch a train of gunpowder which leads from here to the toll-house. There I have some gunpowder stored underneath, enough to blow the old timbers to a thousand fragments. I rather expect that will astonish the officers a little, and while they are recovering from their surprise I shall make off."

The highwaymen were themselves rather surprised by this announcement, and before they had time to make any remark the late toll-keeper exclaimed:

"Now, then, be off as quickly as you can—they are all on the road now. If you hear a slight noise behind you, No. 21—Black Bess."

don't be alarmed—it will only be the old toll-house going to ruin."

It was quite clear that the police officers knew that something unusual was taking place down the road.

They may have suspected the presence of the highwaymen.

At any rate, they rode forth to ascertain what was going on.

The tollman waited until they were at no great distance from him, then taking up the slow-match he applied it to the train of which he had spoken.

There was a rapid and bewildering flash of light along the roadway, then a slight but scarcely appreciable pause, which was followed by a furious roaring noise—a lead explosion and the crash of parting timbers.

A broad red column of light shot up high into the air, revealing for a moment all objects around.

After that a double darkness seemed to settle upon all things.

A universal panic seemed to seize upon the officers.

Their horses, alarmed by the explosion, and the terrific flash of light with which it was accompanied, became restive and unruly, while their riders, deficient of presence of mind enough to guide them, had many narrow escapes of being thrown.

All thought of continuing the chase after the highwaymen was at once abandoned, and the first thing they did upon recovering ordinary possession of their faculties was to ride back to the scene of disaster.

The whole occurrence was, however, shrouded in mystery.

Of the wooden toll-house nothing more than a blackened heap of smouldering ruins remained.

Fortunately no one was hurt.

The ex-toll-keeper made his escape easily—in fact, he had no difficulty whatever in getting away, for the police officers never once suspected his presence.

The event startled the two highwaymen not a little, although they were prepared for it. As soon as the explosion was over, however, Claude Duval said:

"Forward, Jack—let us push on! The officers may not trouble us any further, still it is quite time we got back to our safe quarters."

CHAPTER CMLXX.

THE RENDEZVOUS ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH.—THE ARRIVAL OF TOM KING.

A CHANCE belated wayfarer passing over the south-eastern portion of Hampstead Heath on the night appointed for the meeting of the highwaymen would probably have perceived, glimmering in the darkness, a dull red speck of light.

The chances were, at the time of which we write, that no one would venture to cross the heath after dark. There were no well-kept roads intersecting it as now—no lights—no habitations near, except a few little cottages round the old ivy-grown church at Hampstead.

The night was profoundly dark—the ground itself could scarcely be distinguished beneath the feet, and a light, soft rain was falling, that materially increased the discomforts of those who were compelled to be abroad.

The red light, however, of which we have spoken, continued to make itself visible—indeed, as time passed on, it increased in brightness.

This light, as the reader no doubt suspects, proceeded from a fire kindled on the heath.

Standing over it were two men, and the firelight shining on their faces disclosed the familiar features of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"You were quite right to insist upon lighting a fire, Jack," said Claude Duval, as he stooped down and stirred the embers with a stick. "The night is a most disagreeable one."

"It is," said Jack, with a slight shiver—"there can be no mistake at all about that. What is the time?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Then we are full early yet. No matter; I would sooner wait here than elsewhere."

There was a perceptible amount of agitation in Jack's voice while he spoke. He was exceedingly anxious to know whether his comrades had been as fortunate as himself—whether they would be able to attend the place of meeting.

"I only hope," continued Claude, "that none of our enemies will see this light."

"There is little to fear in that respect, I think," returned Jack. "We have left no clue to guide them here, and who would be out on the heath on such a night as this?"

"Hark!"

"Did you hear anything?"

"I fancy so."

"What was it like?"

"A footstep—a slow, cautious footstep. Hush—listen!"

Both were silent immediately, and for several succeeding moments they listened intently.

But, beyond the low sighing of the wind as it made

its way over the uneven surface of the heath, no sound was heard.

"You must have been mistaken, Claude," said Jack, at length.

"Perhaps so, and yet I scarcely think it."

"All seems still."

"Very."

Claude Duval produced his pistols.

"We must be on our guard against any sudden surprise," he said. "It is impossible to say whether we shall be attacked."

"I am ready. But hark—I am sure I heard the footstep then!"

"Who goes there?" cried Claude Duval, in true sentinel style.

"Tom King—Tom King!" was the reply.

The voice was low and faint, and though it evidently came from somewhere close at hand, yet it seemed as though it had travelled for a long distance.

Claude and Jack turned round, and at the same moment caught sight of their old comrade, Tom King.

But he was in his appearance so greatly altered that they shrank back with something like dismay.

"Why, Tom," ejaculated Claude, "where have you been? What ails you?"

Tom King smiled faintly.

"I look like a ghost, I suppose—do I not?"

"You do indeed!"

"Well, you would not wonder at it if you knew all I have gone through. But the captain—where is he?"

"We have seen nothing of him yet, Tom; but, as you may know, it wants quite an hour to the time of appointment."

"Yes, yes! I hastened here with what speed I could."

"We did the same," was the reply, "and, if nothing has happened, we shall see the captain ere long, depend upon it."

Tom King did indeed look pale and wan.

Since we saw him last, he had done scarcely anything besides riding about the country with the officers close at his heels, escaping them only with the greatest difficulty.

This exertion, the want of rest, and his anxiety of mind, caused his wound to assume an alarming aspect.

He was glad to seat himself near the fire, and as he did so he exclaimed:

"See to my horse, Jack—it is close here; I feel too exhausted."

"Then," said Claude, "try a little of this. I'll warrant that it does you good."

He produced, as he spoke, a bottle of brandy from his pocket, which he had obtained from the inn.

Tom felt wonderfully refreshed after a draught of it; but, as he said, it was rest and food that he required more than stimulants.

His state of exhaustion may be imagined from the fact that it was not until now that he appeared to notice the presence of the fire, or, rather, become aware that it might be the means of bringing their foes upon them.

"This is a great risk," he said—"by far too great."

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"For what reason?" questioned Claude, quickly.

"Do you know that the officers are anywhere at hand?"

"I do not—I scarcely think they are; but yet, in spite of all my precautions during the last day or two, I have not been able to keep out of sight of them many hours together. Through a practical joke that has been played them, I have incurred their bitterest animosity. They are resolved to hunt me down."

"Pooh, pooh, Tom!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Do not speak in that despondent voice. You don't seem like yourself. It is your wound and over exertion that makes you look at things in that light."

"It may be," said Tom—"it may be. I assure you I don't feel myself."

He leaned his head upon his hands while he spoke, and looked steadily at the fire.

"I will put on some more sticks," said Claude—"that will keep down the blaze a little, and I am in hopes that we shall not have to wait long until the captain is with us. When he comes we shall change our quarters."

Tom was so listless and apathetic that he never asked his comrades to what place they intended to go.

After this a long pause ensued.

Claude and Jack were busy thinking about their comrade, who, still sitting by the fire, seemed to have fallen into a state of stupor.

They were silent, too, because they were listening.

The wind made odd, confusing noises as it swept over the heath, and they were anxious to become aware at the earliest moment of the approach either of Dick or the police officers.

But the hour of midnight was slowly given birth by the church at Hampstead without anything whatever occurring to disturb them in the slightest degree.

Their anxiety now reached its highest point. Even Tom King roused himself and rose slowly to his feet.

"Surely," he said, "that was the old clock at Hampstead striking twelve?"

"It was."

"And no signs of the captain?"

"None at present."

Silence again succeeded these few brief sentences; but, although they listened long and intently, they failed to catch the sound they so much wished to hear.

Tom King's condition continued to increase the uneasiness his companions felt.

It was soon evident that he was incapable of standing for any length of time without support, and, with a weary sigh, he sank down again into his former position.

Here he remained, motionless and silent, until all at once he raised his head and exclaimed:

"They are coming now—they are coming now! I can hear them quite distinctly. Put out the fire—put it out, or they will be upon us at once!"

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack started when they first heard his words.

Then instantly assumed listening attitudes.

But their well-practised ears failed to catch any sound at all resembling that which would be made by the approach of horsemen.

"You have been dreaming," they said, at last. "It is your fancy."

"No," said Tom, in greater excitement than before. "I tell you that I can hear them now plainer than ever. Listen—listen, and you will hear them too!"

CHAPTER CMLXXI.

SOME SINGULAR EVENTS TAKE PLACE BY NIGHT IN THE LITTLE RURAL CHURCH.

"Hush, Maud—hush!" said Dick Turpin, in a suppressed voice. "Keep your calmness, and I will answer for the rest."

"But where shall you go?" she asked, in a trembling voice—"where can you seek shelter now?"

"I shall not move," replied Dick, "until I learn that the officers—if such they are—really intend to enter this churchyard. It may be that they have only just halted there by accident, and that they intend to go riding on."

"Now, Dick," was the answer, "you must not cheat yourself into that belief. They are opening the gate now."

Maud was perfectly correct.

The rattling sound made by the hasty introduction of a key into the lock of the churchyard gate was distinctly heard in the silence that prevailed around, and then afterwards there was a grating, creaking noise as the gate was slowly pushed open.

Dick took Black Bess by the bridle with one hand, while he passed his other arm round Maud's waist.

"We will quit the porch," he said, "and yet not go far away—at all events, until we know something more than we know now."

Maud made not the slightest hesitation or demur.

In less than a moment the church porch was vacated.

Dick took up his position close to the side of it, standing in the angle formed by it and the church wall—a spot where the darkness was much greater than anywhere else.

Rapid as his movements had been, however, scarcely

had he taken up this position than footsteps could be distinctly heard upon the hard gravel-path.

Dick leaned forward and strained his eyes anxiously, in order to make out the nature of these new-comers.

At first he saw nothing save a black moving mass, which on a nearer approach resolved itself into a small throng of persons.

The obscurity was too great, nevertheless, for Dick to say positively that they were not police officers.

Evidently the porch was their destination, for they walked straight towards it, and just as they passed within it, Dick caught sight, as he believed, of a female, but she was so surrounded by men shrouded in long cloaks that he could not make sure.

"Open the door," said a deep voice, in commanding tones—"open the door, and be quick about it! We have no time to waste!"

"I am opening it, worshipful sir," was the answer. "One moment! The lock is rather stiff, and my strength begins to fail me."

The person who had first spoken uttered an impatient exclamation, but even as it passed his lips the door leading into the church was opened, and the whole throng hastily entered.

Dick gave a long sigh of relief.

"You see, Maud, I was quite right in my suspicions—these people have nothing at all to do with us."

"Yes, so I find," said Maud. "And now that they have all entered, let us make the best speed we can to Hampstead."

"With all my heart," returned Turpin. "And yet before we move I should like to take one peep at the interior of the church. I am strongly filled with curiosity at what I have seen. I long to see more."

"No, no—do not seek fresh danger, Dick—make your escape while you have the opportunity."

"Tush—tush! There is no danger—none at all. Keep still. I will just take a peep through yonder window—that will satisfy me abundantly."

He pointed to a small window close by—a window which they had not previously noticed, but now it could be distinctly seen, in consequence of the light that beamed from it.

The sill of this window was at a tolerable height from the ground, but Dick managed to peep through the latticed casement by standing on the broad flat stone of a tomb that adjoined the wall of the church.

A singular scene now presented itself to his gaze—a scene which he had not at all expected to behold.

He beckoned Maud to approach and take her place by his side.

She was not proof against the curiosity which would be felt by anyone in consequence of such a strange visit to a church at so late an hour, and therefore, despite the agitation and terror that she felt, Maud stood upon the tombstone, and peeped into the interior.

She saw that the church was tolerably well illuminated by a number of wax candles standing near the altar, and which, though only just lighted, gave forth considerable light.

Every moment this light increased.

Then it was seen that the party which had entered the church was composed of several persons, all dressed in so rich and elegant a manner as proved them to belong to the upper class of society.

They had cast aside the long cloaks in which they had been enveloped when walking up the gravel-path.

Among them, too, was a girl, fair, young, and beautiful.

Her dress was of white satin, and a white veil was thrown over her head, so that, in the semi-obscurity prevailing in the church, she formed quite a conspicuous object.

But her countenance, upon which the rays of the candles fell, was clearly seen by the two watchers, and it was with no slight amount of surprise that they noticed the fair features were convulsed with anguish, and that tears were rolling rapidly down her cheeks.

Her hands were clasped tightly together, and she was standing in an attitude of imploring entreaty before a man who, with folded arms, looked coldly on her, evidently disregarding her distress.

By the movement of this girl's lips, they could tell that she was speaking, though her voice was well-nigh choked with sobs.

A faint murmur alone came to the ears of Maud and Dick, who in vain tried to make out what was said.

The young girl placed her clasped hands upon this man's shoulder, but he instantly and roughly shook her off.

At the same time, he turned his face towards a distant corner of the church, while, in those deep, stern tones which they had before heard, he cried:

"Is there to be no end to this delay? Cannot the ceremony at once be proceeded with?"

A slight movement followed these words, and then from out of a corner emerged a white figure, which in a moment or so afterwards the two watchers had no difficulty in recognising as a clergyman.

With an aspect of humility in his gait and deportment, this clergyman walked up the silent aisle, and then, opening the little gate in the altar rails, walked up to the communion-table, from which he picked up a book.

The grief of the young girl was now something terrible to witness—she at times shrieked aloud in the bitterness of her anguish.

Then the one with the stern voice—*who, from his manner, as well as from a certain distant resemblance between them, Dick conjectured to be the girl's father—advanced, and, seizing her by the wrist, dragged her violently forward.*

At the same time, he took hold of the hand of one of his companions—a tall, thin young man, with dark, heavy, overhanging brows, which gave a peculiar appearance to his countenance.

His brow was now contracted into a frown, and so low did his brows descend that they seemed to reach his cheeks, leaving his eyes invisible.

With unmistakable aversion, the young girl shuddered and attempted to draw back; but her strength, compared with her father's, was as nothing, and he compelled the couple to join hands.

Slowly and reluctantly, the young girl was then literally dragged up to the altar.

The clergyman, who should have interfered in such a case, and not have been a willing accomplice in such villany, appeared to be quite unconscious of what was taking place around him.

He held before his eyes a large book, from which he appeared to be reading devoutly.

On reaching the altar, the young girl fell suddenly upon her knees, and with a rapid movement disengaged her hand from that of the intended bridegroom.

Once more assuming her former imploring attitude, she again spoke as well as her emotion would allow her.

It was just when events had reached this point that Dick's attention was distracted by another sound, coming from an altogether different direction, and yet a sound which, despite the interest he felt in what was going on before him, he could not disregard.

This was the loud and rapid clatter of a horse's feet.

Some one intent upon making the utmost speed was galloping along the high-road.

Maud heard the sound, and instantly forgot all that she was witnessing.

"There is no need for alarm, Maud," said Dick, in a reassuring voice—"from a single horseman we have nothing to fear."

"Are you sure that only one is coming?"

"Quite sure, though the clatter is prodigious."

Just as he spoke, the sound of the horse's feet ceased suddenly.

"There's an accident," said Dick—"I feel sure of it!"

He was deliberating whether to quit the churchyard, in the hope of being able to render some assistance, when a hasty footstep became audible, and directly afterwards he saw a slight, slim figure running at full speed up the avenue.

This figure made its way to the church door, which gave way before the sudden impetus with which he rushed against it.

He burst into the sacred edifice with the rapidity of lightning.

At the same time, he drew his bright, polished sword from its sheath, and whirled it round him.

Maud and Dick were now once more gazing through the window

Loud exclamations of rage and hate followed the entrance of the stranger, who, by the light which now filled the church, was seen to be a young man of handsome and imposing presence.

Swords were drawn, but before one of them could make a movement, the intended bride, with a shrill scream that seemed to electrify all present, sprang from her kneeling posture, and, fleet as a fawn, hastened to place herself beside the new-comer.

It was wonderful to observe what an effect this action had upon him.

He seemed at once to receive a tremendous accession of courage.

"Down with him!" cried the father of the intended bride—"down with him! Let him not escape! I will hold you all harmless from the consequences of the deed!"

But these words did not cause the young stranger to lose his self-possession in the least.

He whispered a few words to the companion at his side, then, presenting the same bold front, slowly retreated, step by step, towards the church door.

Up to now Dick had remained a perfectly passive spectator of the whole scene.

He had not been able to find any opportunity for interfering.

Now, however, the opportunity presented itself.

His sympathies were fully enlisted on behalf of the young girl, and it was a kind of instinct that made him resolve to side with the young stranger against so many powerful enemies, and assist him to escape.

There was nothing that Dick admired more than courage and true bravery, qualities which it was evident this young stranger possessed in no common degree.

Accordingly, without saying a word to Maud, Dick hastily stepped down off the tomb, and made his way to the door of the church.

He entered quickly, and found that he had made his appearance not a moment too soon.

"Cowards!" he cried, in a loud, ringing voice—"cowards! Would so many of you attack a single man?"

His words and his unexpected appearance for a brief space of time seemed to paralyse the young stranger's assailants.

The girl's father, however, was the first to recover himself.

"This is only one of his vile associates!" he said. "Down with them both! Surely you can be a match for two! Drag Silvia from him!"

"Back—back!" cried Dick, addressing the young man, who gazed in wonder at this new and unlooked-for ally. "Get to the door as quickly as you can! It is madness to contend against so many!"

The whole marriage party—if so it may be termed—now attacked Dick and the young stranger.

Had any of them been provided with firearms, then, beyond a doubt, the highwayman's life would have been in great danger.

The only weapons they carried, however, were swords, and under these circumstances there was just the chance that a skilful swordsman would be able for a second or so to keep them at bay.

Few knew better how to handle this weapon than Dick Turpin, and on the present occasion he made a good probation of his skill.

The bright steel weapons clashed together with a sound that brought out many a strange echo from odd nooks in the old church.

Upon seeing the combatants engaged, Maud uttered a piercing shriek, and this sound added not a little to the confusion of all present.

Silvia, for so she had been named, was unable to bear any longer the horrors of the scene, and sank off into a state of utter insensibility.

The young man to whom she had flown so quickly for protection evidently thought Dick's advice was good, for, picking up his inanimate burden in his arms, he ran hastily with her to the door of the church.

Dick followed him closely, covering his retreat by continually dealing circular sweeps with his heavy sword, which nothing could withstand.

All this, that has of necessity taken us some time to describe, actually took no more than a few seconds in oc-

occurring, so that when Maud entered the church porch the young man was in the act of leaving it with his senseless burden.

Directly afterwards Dick followed.

With the quickness of lightning, he flung his sword to the ground.

Then, seizing the massive oaken door, he pulled it shut after him.

His hands were already upon the key, which was still sticking in the lock, as Silvia's father was too impatient to allow it to be removed.

As quick, then, as the eye could wink, the door closed with a bang, and the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER CMLXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL MAKES A PROPOSITION TO HIS COMPANIONS.

"CAGED!" shouted Dick Turpin, in a voice of exultation—"caged! That was neatly done, I rather think!"

He stopped abruptly, for just then Maud flung her arms around him.

"You are hurt," she cried—"you are wounded!"

"No, no—not scratched."

"But I say you are—here in the arm!"

Dick carried his hand towards the place, and then, to his surprise, felt that his coat sleeve was wet with blood.

"It is nothing," he replied—"a touch that in the heat of my blood I had not felt. Hark!"

A furious hammering sound came from the other side of the church door.

"Knock away," Dick cried, derisively—"the door is strong enough to laugh at all your efforts. Come, Maud, we will leave this place."

Gladly Maud obeyed; but as soon as they emerged from the porch, Dick again paused.

The young man had placed Silvia on the ground in the churchyard.

Her head was resting on his knee, and he was endeavouring to restore her to consciousness.

"Fly!" cried Dick, addressing him—"Fly while you have time! Your only hope of safety lies in instant flight! They are all within the church now, but they will soon find a means of leaving it!"

"Then I can die in her defence!"

"There is no need for that. Fly, I say, and take your companion with you!"

"If I dared."

"Dared?" repeated Dick, in astonishment. "She loves you, and you would save her from a fate worse than death!"

"I—I trust she loves me."

"Believe it. Her actions prove it. Do not waste another moment, as you value your own life and her happiness!"

"But you, sir?" cried the young man, rising to his feet, and looking inquiringly at the highwayman. "May I ask in whom I have so strangely found a friend?"

"No matter. I tell you there is no time for talk! Raise her up in your arms, and follow me! Hark! I told you they would find a way out!"

A terrific crash of glass accompanied Dick's words.

It seemed as though one of the large windows in the sacred edifice had been dashed completely from its setting.

The sound served to arouse the young man and quicken his exertions, though, to tell the truth, his brain was in a whirl, for events had taken so sudden and strange a turn that he is to be excused for feeling a little bewildered.

Following Dick's directions, he picked Silvia up in his arms, and strode with her rapidly along the gravel-path.

Dick and Maud hurried after them, and Black Bess, who had watched attentively every one of her master's movements, brought up the rear.

At the gate the stranger paused.

"My horse is utterly exhausted," he said, "besides, he fell heavily with me the moment I reached the gate."

"So much the better!" cried Dick. "Mount one of these. I will help this lady to seat herself before you,

and I will start the other horses to keep you company."

"Why do that?"

"Why, to prevent all chance of pursuit, to be sure!"

"Yes, yes—of course! But pardon me—I am so confused that I am altogether incapable of anything resembling calm thought."

He mounted while he spoke.

Silvia had by this time partially recovered possession of her senses.

Dick lifted her easily to the saddle.

"Now," he cried, "off and away, and my best wishes go with you! Not another moment! See, they are rushing down the path!"

The young man did not stay to turn his head to obtain confirmation of Dick's words, but struck spurs to his horse's flanks instead.

It should be stated that all the horses had been secured to the gate leading into the churchyard, and left there. Dick released them quickly, giving each a sharp cut with a stick as he did so.

Away they flew along the high-road after the two lovers, and ere the discomfited bridal party could emerge from the gate they had all disappeared round the curve a few yards ahead.

Dick Turpin's course was now clear and easy enough.

He placed Maud upon the back of Black Bess, then mounted himself.

He took off his hat and made an ironical bow to the excited throng, who were in various ways giving expression to the mortification and anger they experienced.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said—"a pleasant walk to you! The young couple are quite safe from your pursuit. Shame upon you all to contemplate such a deed!"

With these words, Dick Turpin allowed the reins to fall upon the back of Black Bess.

That was all the noble creature wanted to urge her forward.

Away she flew, and when Dick next turned his head to look behind him the church was completely out of sight.

"An odd adventure, Maud, was it not?" he exclaimed, as he slackened his mare's speed slightly. "Still, I feel that I acted rightly. Without my interference I believe two young hearts would have been made wretched for ever!"

"But your arm?" said Maud, apprehensively. "Are you sure it is no more than a trifling hurt?"

"Quite sure; but, for all that, it is bleeding yet, so we will try a bandage."

Dick's broad neckcloth served well enough for this purpose, and after this slight interruption the journey to Hampstead was continued.

But more time had been, from first to last, consumed by this little incident than Dick believed, and he was quite surprised to find the hour was midnight while he was yet some distance from his destination.

On making this discovery he pressed onward more rapidly, for he knew well that his companions would be suffering great anxiety on his account.

The journey was one that alarmed Maud considerably; but when she found herself in the vicinity of Hampstead Heath, without the occurrence of a single incident, she began to recover her ordinary composure.

The heath was covered with a darkness so intense that Dick found it necessary to reduce his mare's speed to a walking pace.

Fortunately he was thoroughly acquainted with the nature of the ground, otherwise he could not have made his way to that one particular spot where they had agreed to meet.

It was not long, therefore, before Dick caught sight of the red gleam of light proceeding from the fire.

At first this baffled him considerably, and made him doubt whether he had really made his way in the right direction.

Upon coming nearer, and finding that a fire was actually burning on the heath, he paused irresolutely.

"What is it?" Maud asked, with anxiety. "Why do you pause?"

"Do you see that light yonder?"

"Yes. What is it? What does it portend?"

"That is just what I am trying to find out," replied Dick. "That ought to be the place where we agreed to meet; but how comes it there is a light visible? Surely, if the others have arrived first, they have not been so foolhardy as to make a fire?"

This was a matter upon which Maud could give no opinion, and therefore she remained silent.

After a few moments more deliberation, however, Dick again slowly advanced.

From this it will be guessed that Tom King was not laboring under any mistake when he cried out, that he could hear some one approaching; but his fancy misled him to a certain extent, inasmuch as he believed that police officers, and not Dick Turpin, were approaching.

"Who is there?" cried Claude, raising his voice upon finding that only one horse was approaching. "Is that you, captain?"

"It is," was the reply, and the next moment Dick Turpin joined his comrades.

They were rejoiced indeed to find that he had escaped comparatively unharmed all the many perils which had beset him since they parted, and he experienced an equal amount of satisfaction.

The arrival of Dick had an inspiring effect upon Tom King, who, by a great effort, shook off much of the languor with which he had been overcome.

"I am hurt, captain," he said, "but not badly. The wound is a trifling one; but I have neglected it, and I have been much harassed. A little rest will quickly put me right."

"I hope so," said Dick; "but now that we are all here, let us, in the first place, consider our future movements. Shall we separate again or not; and if not, where shall we go?"

"I anticipated that question, captain," answered Claude, quickly, "and I am glad to say that the point will require very little discussion."

"How so?"

"Why, Jack and myself have been fortunate enough to discover a retreat that will answer most admirably for the purpose of concealing us. We have thoroughly examined it, and are both fully impressed with its advantages."

"That, then, is good news," said Dick. "I, too, had found a place of refuge, and one which even yet may some day stand us in good stead; but there are many disagreeables and discomforts in connection with it—discomforts which your shelter may not possess."

"Silence!" cried Maud, at this moment—"silence, all of you! I am certain I heard a voice."

"A voice?" echoed the highwaymen, in slight alarm.

"Yes; it is, indeed, faint and far off, but I do believe it was a voice."

"We will listen," said Dick. "I know, Maud, that your ears are keen."

They listened accordingly, and then they heard first what was unmistakably a rapid footstep.

Some one was running across the heath towards the light at full speed.

Hearing this, the highwaymen all produced their arms.

They felt certain it could be no friend that was nearing them.

Suddenly, however, a voice that was almost inarticulate from breathlessness said:

"Captain—captain, are you there? If so, speak at once! Captain—captain!"

Upon hearing these words, the highwaymen all looked at one another in great surprise.

But Tom King quickly exclaimed:

"I know that voice—it belongs to one who has befriended me—one without whose aid I verily believe I should never have escaped from the police officers; but I will tell you all by-and-by. Take my word for it now—he is to be trusted."

"Then answer him."

"Jack," said Tom, "I am here."

The next moment, the ostler from the loney inn made his appearance.

He was panting and breathless, so much so that he could not, for the life of him, speak a word, although he made violent efforts to do so.

Looking at him, the highwaymen perceived that his

apparel was torn and disordered, as though he had recently been engaged in a severe struggle, while one side of his face and head was smeared and matted with blood.

"Take your time," said Dick—"take your time; then tell us what you have to say."

"Officers!" the ostler gasped out—"the officers are close at hand!"

"But not coming here, surely?"

"Yes, yes—in pursuit of me! They have done nothing but hunt me for days past. I knew that I was near the captain here, and was certain that he was coming to this place—not that I should have troubled him, only my horse was shot down under me; another bullet has ploughed up my cheek, and, as I fell bleeding to the ground, the officers pounced upon me and made me prisoner!"

"But you have escaped."

"Yes, I have escaped, and only a few minutes since, and that by the greatest miracle in the world. But the officers are after me; in a few moments at the most you will hear them."

"I can hear them now," was the response, and as the words were spoken, loud voices could be heard shouting in the distance, mingled with which came the dull, heavy beat of horses' hoofs upon the turf.

"We must be off," said Dick. "Are your horses all fresh?"

"Tolerably so, captain," was the reply.

"Then, Claude and Jack, you shall lead the way to this place of shelter you have spoken of—at any rate, we will pay it a visit now, and judge of its merits."

"Good!" was the reply. "Hallo, there, look at Tom!"

These last words were uttered in a very different tone to the preceding ones.

They were called forth by the fact that Tom King had made a hasty effort to mount his horse, but had failed, and after staggering a moment, fell to the ground.

"The captain is weak," said the ostler, "and I don't wonder at it—he is badly in want of rest."

"What is to be done?" said Dick. "It is certain he is incapable of retaining his seat in the saddle."

"If you don't mind me speaking——" said the ostler, hesitatingly.

"No, no. Say on—speak freely!"

"Well, then, I was going to propose that you allowed me to sit on the captain's horse, then you could place him on the saddle in front of me; I would clasp him round the waist, and by that means he will be able to ride well enough."

"Yes, yes," said Tom King, faintly, before any of the others could reply—"that's what I wish to be done."

This settled the matter.

Jack, the ostler, was mounted and seated in the twinkling of an eye.

By the joint exertions of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, Tom King was raised and placed in front of him.

"I can hold the reins," he exclaimed, "if you will clasp me tightly and prevent me from falling off."

"Right, captain—right!"

"This is one more obligation I shall owe you," said Tom King, "for without your aid, it is certain I should never have escaped the officers."

"We have not escaped them yet."

"No," said Dick Turpin, "but we are in a fair way of doing so. Quick, Claude, and you, Jack—make haste and lead the way; depend upon it, we shall not lag many paces in the rear!"

CHAPTER CMLXXXII

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN DECIDE UPON THE NATURE OF THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

THE next moment the highwaymen moved off, Dick Turpin insisting upon bringing up the rear.

By this time they had all become tolerably well accustomed to the darkness that prevailed, so that they were able to distinguish the ground just in front of their horses' heads.

But, very wisely under such circumstances, they trusted far more to the sagacity of the animals them-

selves than to their own ability to steer them clear of obstacles.

Claude Duval led the way with much confidence.

The speed at which they went was, comparatively speaking, slow, and yet rather faster than most persons would have considered consistent with safety.

"We shall baffle them before we quit the heath, or it's odd to me," he said, to Sixteen-String Jack. "The darkness is terrific—I will defy them to see us; and the ground is so soft and turfy that the horses' feet scarcely make a sound, going at this gentle pace."

This was true enough; but, nevertheless, they could hear behind them, more distinctly than was at all pleasant, the continuous shouting of the officers as they bawled out to one another, and occasionally the rattling of the cutlasses which they carried.

When once the highwaymen gained the border of the heath, and their horses' feet felt the firm roadway beneath them, they set off at full gallop.

By this means they obtained a very considerable start of their pursuers, who were still winding their way over the broken ground, unable to push on at any faster speed than a trot.

Most fortunate indeed was it that the friendly ostler had appeared at so opportune a moment.

But for him it would have been hard to say how Tom King could have contrived to join in the flight at all.

But this ostler, like most of his class, was an excellent horseman, and was as secure and at home when seated in the saddle as he possibly could be anywhere.

Therefore to him the feat of holding Tom King on was easy enough, though to an unpractised horseman it would have been beset with difficulties, for every now and then, in spite of the command which he strove to keep over himself, Tom King would lean suddenly to one side, to such an extent on many occasions that it required the whole of the ostler's strength to bring him back to his former position.

And now, with great suddenness, the wind, which had so long been moaning and sighing, dropped altogether.

There was an unnatural calm in the atmosphere, which endured only for a few seconds.

Then a tremendous downpour of rain was discharged from the clouds.

So thickly and so heavily did the rain-drops fall that in the space of a few moments the whole of the fugitives were soaked with wet.

Still, although the rain beat with painful force into their faces, depriving them almost of breath and of the power to see, they pushed on, knowing full well that, disagreeable as this event was, they would nevertheless be able to turn it to good account.

Certainly, if anything was calculated to clear all the roads in the shortest space of time, that shower was, for no one would willingly endure it any longer than was required for them to gain the nearest place of shelter.

For some time the rain continued to fall at this violent rate; but by degrees it subsided, and when something like tolerable calmness prevailed, the highwaymen all listened intently.

As they fully expected, not a single sound could be heard in the rear.

Evidently the police officers, baffled by the rain, had given up the chase in despair.

"On—on!" cried Dick. "It is not worth while to linger now; the sooner we reach this place of shelter you speak of the better."

These words were addressed to Claude, who made no other reply than setting his horse in motion.

For the rest of the journey scarcely a word was exchanged.

Certainly, nothing was said of sufficient importance to merit being set down.

Nor did they see or hear anything of the police officers, or even of a human being.

When at some distance from the ruined castle, Claude Duval pulled up, and pointed towards it.

The lofty, ruined keep could just be dimly distinguished when pointed out as a mass of something blacker than the clouds, which formed a background to it.

"Let us approach with caution," said Claude Duval. "If we are too careful we only make a mistake on the right side, that's all."

This was at once assented to

But although they took every precaution they could think of, they failed to see or hear anything of an alarming nature.

When the courtyard was at length safely gained, the horses were left in charge of the ostler.

In good truth, the highwaymen were by no means sorry to have met with such an ally.

Beyond a doubt, his fidelity might be depended upon, and in more ways than one he would prove useful, should he feel inclined to share their fortunes.

Even Dick did not hesitate to surrender Black Bess to his charge: after which, drawing Maud's shivering form closer to him, he followed Claude and Sixteen-String Jack to the entrance of the secret passage.

It was easily found; then a light was produced, which enabled them to make the descent rapidly and easily.

Many were the ejaculations of surprise that were given when they fully comprehended the nature of this strange place.

They questioned Claude eagerly as to how he had discovered it.

But he said.

"We have many mutual explanations to give; let this stand over till to-morrow. In the meanwhile, we will make a roaring fire in the alchemist's furnace, and dry our clothes; after that, a hasty meal and a good long sleep will be the best things we can have."

This proposal was universally assented to.

The fire was duly made, and the remains of the provisions which Claude and Jack had brought from the village inn were produced, and equally divided.

There was not one among them that was not thoroughly wearied out, yet it was necessary that some one should watch while the others slept.

Tom King, now that the ride was over, seemed much better; but his wound was re-dressed, and carefully bandaged up, after which he seemed to sink off into a slumber, so profound that it was hard to distinguish it from total insensibility.

Claude and Jack went above to watch, and until daylight the duty was shared between them and the ostler, who would have watched during the whole of the time if they had permitted him, he was so anxious, he said, to do something to recompense them for having saved him from a capture.

Not the least alarm was given, and when the highwaymen met in the morning they were able to congratulate themselves upon the fact that they had managed to reach their present place of security without their presence in that part of the country being at all suspected.

Under these circumstances, all they had to do was to keep perfectly quiet.

The greatest impatience was manifested on all sides for an account of all that had happened since the separation in the plantation.

To narrate all this, as the reader must be aware, occupied a long time indeed—the greater part of the day was spent in this manner.

But, unquestionably, the strangest circumstance and the one that produced the greatest amount of discussion was the account which Dick Turpin gave of having seen his two comrades, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, meet and accost each other on the summit of the hill.

With tolerable accuracy, Dick Turpin described the exact spot where this strange event occurred, and, after the most careful consideration, Claude Duval and Jack came to the conclusion that they must have been on that particular morning very many miles from the hill Dick mentioned.

But what was strangest of all was, that on that very morning they had met in the manner Dick described, which, as will be recollected, was after their brief separation, and just before Claude and Jack made their way to the inn from which they departed so opportunely.

Tom King was the only one of the party who had listened to the whole of this adventure without making a remark.

But now, when all was fully described, he said:

"There is one way, and only one way, in which what Dick has seen can be accounted for, and that, I imagine, is the true key to the mystery."

"What is it, Tom?" they asked, eagerly—"what is it?"

"Well, then," he said, with a melancholy smile, for his spirit was always saddened when he had occasion to refer to the past, "many years ago, in my youth—I mean, I remember reading—how such an occurrence is far from uncommon. It depends upon some strange state of the atmosphere, which I cannot explain to you, but which brings suddenly distant objects close to hand, so that sometimes, in the midst of a vast plain, trees and houses have been seen, which, upon a closer approach, have seemed to melt into the air."

"Let us ascribe it, then, to that," said Dick, "and so dispose of the subject, for we have far more pressing subjects that require our attention. None of you have mentioned Tom Davis yet; I trust he is not forgotten."

"Certainly not, captain—certainly not! We were waiting for you to speak."

"Well, then, the question is, what shall be done? I confess I have already made up my mind, and that is, at every risk, to set him at liberty; he deserves as much at our hands."

"He does—he does!" was the unanimous reply.

"Such being the case, then," continued Dick, "we can easily arrange the rest. When he is set at liberty we will furnish him with what money we are able to obtain, and put him in the way of leaving England. If we can see him safely aboard some vessel, then I shall feel that we have done our duty to him."

"But," said Claude Duval, "before we go any further, it is necessary that we should learn something more as to his position at the present moment."

"Precisely so," said Dick; "and a knowledge can only be obtained by a journey to London."

"But who is to take it?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Not you, Dick—not you!" cried Maud, for the first time joining in the conversation. "Surely you will not run the risk of paying another visit?"

"Why not?"

"It is tempting your fate too much. Let me go," she added. "I shall be less likely to be suspected than you, and I can bring you back all the information you require."

Dick shook his head.

"I am sorry to deny you, Maud; but, in good truth, it cannot be. I should suffer more on your account than you could possibly suffer on mine, for you would know that I was able to extricate myself from any perilous situation, while you would be incapable of doing so."

"Then," said Claude, "suppose I go."

"I am willing, too," said Jack.

"And I as well," said Tom King, faintly, "if I only felt a little stronger and better."

"You are out of the question, Tom," said Dick; "but what I propose is, that Claude, Jack, and myself shall draw lots. It can easily be managed by a few splinters of wood—one longer than the rest. Whoever draws that, goes to London, and the other two will, in the meanwhile, set out upon an excursion to obtain such a sum of money as would be useful to Tom Davis after we have rescued him."

This was assented to without the least demur, for whatever Maud may have felt upon the subject she kept to herself, knowing from experience that it was useless for her to raise her voice in such an affair.

The small pieces of wood were rapidly prepared, and held by Tom King.

Three were drawn, and Dick Turpin was found to hold the longest.

"That is as I wished," he exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "I have longed for the opportunity to go, for I feel that it is something which particularly concerns myself."

"But when shall you start?" asked Maud, timidly.

"To-night, as soon as it is dark enough to leave here safely."

"But you will need a disguise," said Claude Duval. "Where shall you obtain that?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"It strikes me I shall take very few precautions in that way," he replied. "If I wait here until I find a disguise I shall never go at all. I will ride off, and trust entirely to good luck to befriend me."

"We have an hour or two to spare yet," said Sixteen-

String Jack, "and there would be no harm if we were to spend that time in making our arrangements a little more fully."

"None whatever. But first of all, I will go and see that Black Bess is in readiness."

"Why not take one of the other horses?" said Tom King. "Black Bess must be as well known, as yourself."

"That may be," said Dick, "and no doubt is the case; but if I went without her that would be no safeguard to me, but the reverse. When I am seated on her back, I feel an amount of confidence and security which I cannot feel elsewhere. No, no—Black Bess must accompany me on my mission, or I must give it up altogether."

With these words, Dick hastened to one portion of the ruins which the ostler had already extemporised into a kind of stable.

He was rejoiced to find his gallant mare looking fresh and ready for any amount of exertion.

The time between then and nightfall passed quickly, for there was much to talk about and decide upon.

It was agreed that Tom King, Maud, and the ostler should remain at the ruins—that Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval should seek a night of adventures, while Dick made his way to London.

Oddly enough, not a word was said about his return, and probably this would have been left altogether unmentioned had not Maud put the question just as Dick seated himself in the saddle.

"There are many hours between now and daybreak," he replied, "and I have them all before me. I shall try my best to get back here before day dawns. All will, however, depend upon circumstances. If I can see good reason for remaining away—if I feel that I should be safer elsewhere—I shall not come here; so do not expect me. Rest assured that, for my own sake alone, I will take the best care of myself."

But Maud could tell, by the manner in which he pronounced these words, that he was just then in the humor for any adventure, no matter of how dangerous a character; and with a burst of grief which she could not control, for her heart foreboded much coming evil, Maud covered her face and turned away.

"Farewell!" said Dick, in cheerful tones—"farewell, yet not for long! I shall soon return, bringing the needful intelligence with me."

CHAPTER CMLXXIV.

GOOD FORTUNE APPEARS TO INAUGURATE DICK TURPIN'S EXPEDITION.

As he gave utterance to these words, Dick Turpin set Black Bess in motion, and took his way slowly from the castle ruins.

Jack the ostler had been sent out as a kind of scout to ascertain that there was no one loitering near, and at this moment he appeared, saying:

"All right, captain—there's not a soul about. You may venture to ride off boldly."

Nevertheless, Dick Turpin did not altogether relax his caution, but continued to keep a sharp look-out on all sides.

But as soon as the ruins were fairly behind him, he allowed Black Bess to put forth her powers of speed.

There was on this occasion a feeling of freedom and ease, as well as energy and determination, about Dick's heart to which he had been for a long time a perfect stranger.

Maud had rightly defined his frame of mind.

But for all his light-heartedness, Dick, as he rode along, wondered by what means he should obtain a disguise.

To ride to London in his own proper character was a feat of daring from which even he recoiled.

Such a proceeding would have been nothing short of actual insanity.

But when and how was he to find the means of so well disguising himself that, should he by chance encounter any of his foes, they would fail to recognise him.

This was a question he asked himself over and over again without, however, being able to frame anything like a satisfactory reply to it.



[DICK TURPIN ASTONISHES OLD MATTHEW.]

Despairing at last of coming to a conclusion just at present, he exclaimed:

"On, Bess, old lass—forward! Now there's plenty of time before us, and I must trust to chance to put something in my way."

Just then Black Bess was crossing a smooth, well-kept meadow of vast extent.

Coming to a low hedge, which divided it from another field, she rose freely in the air, and alighted in safety on the other side.

But the manner in which she came down made Dick aware of something which he might have ascertained before, had not his thoughts been so preoccupied.

This was that the second field had been ploughed up, and, owing to the rain which had lately fallen, was now in a very heavy condition indeed.

This discovery, however, was not made until too late, No. 202.—BLACK BESS.

for such was the impulse Black Bess had gained, that it was impossible to rein her up all at once.

Dick could see the opposite side of the field, and finding there really was not far to go, he resolved to push on rather than turn back.

All at once, however, a loud voice struck upon his ears.

"Hoi—hoi!" cried some one—"hullo, there! What are you doing? Turn back—turn back, I say, or I will take you up!"

Dick looked in the direction from which these sounds appeared to come, and then he caught sight of a stont man, attired in the dress of a parish constable, running hastily towards him.

Although the moon was not shining, yet a certain portion of her light found its way from the clouds, and so diffused a kind of dim radiance over the earth, so that

Dick was able to see this man with tolerable plainness.

As may be suspected, however, the highwayman paid not the slightest attention to this demand to turn back.

So far from doing so, he continued to advance at the same easy pace as before.

This evidently infuriated the constable to no ordinary extent.

He shouted, and bawled, and ran until he was out of breath, for it was no trifling achievement to run across a ploughed field in such a condition as that was.

The constable, indeed, looked as ludicrous as any such dignified personage possibly could do under any circumstances.

Every time he lifted his feet from the ground he brought with him a huge mass of soil, which was so heavy and clung so pertinaciously to him that it threatened to pull his boots off at every stride.

Nevertheless, as he was making his way directly towards the highwayman, his slow rate of progression was not of much consequence.

A meeting quickly took place.

"Stop, you villain!" he roared, at length, when he found himself close to Black Bess—"stop, I say! Are you deaf? Can't you hear what I say?"

While he spoke, he seized Black Bess by the bridle.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, calmly, yet he spoke the words in an absent manner, which may be accounted for by the fact that just then his mind was very busily occupied with a fresh idea that had just entered it.

"Matter?" said the constable, endeavoring to speak calmly as well, but failing lamentably. "Don't you know that you are trespassing, sir? No one is allowed to cross these fields, and so I must insist upon making you turn back! Turn at once, and be thankful that you are let off so easily!"

Dick took a glance around him, as the constable thought to ascertain his position in the field, for the next words he said were:

"But look here, my good friend, don't you see that I'm already half-way across this field, and, so far as any damage I may do is concerned, it will be just the same thing whether you allow me to keep straight on, or whether you compel me to turn back."

"Do you presume to dictate to me, sir?" said the constable. "Is that the return that you make for my leniency? Consider yourself my prisoner!"

"Your what?"

"Prisoner. I spoke plain enough, didn't I, stupid?"

"But do you know who I am?"

"No, nor care either."

"So it seems," added Dick, who had already, while this brief conversation was going on, matured his plan of operations. "Still, I think it rather strange that you should presume to speak to me like this on my own land."

"Your what?"

"Land," said Dick, quickly. "I spoke plain enough, didn't I, stupid?"

"Come—come," said the constable, "none of your nonsense! I daresay you think yourself a mighty clever fellow, but there are others as clever as yourself. Come this way. I won't say another word to you."

"But I shall to you," said Dick. "I ask you again, do you know who I am? Of course you do not, or else you would not presume to talk to me about trespassing on my own land."

"How can it be your land," said the constable, "when everyone knows that it belongs to Squire Verralls? And he won't allow trespassers on his estate."

"Well, it will be mine some day," said Dick—"at least, in a manner of speaking. Come a little closer, and I will tell you who I am."

"Shan't I!" was the answer. "You can tell me from where you are, if you like."

"You will regret your behaviour," said Dick. "Let me tell you that you have been addressing yourself to one who will one day be your Sovereign. I am George Frederick, Prince of Wales."

The constable was greatly taken aback by this audacious statement.

He retained his hold upon the bridle of Black Bess at

"Nonsense—nonsense," he cried, recovering himself—"nothing of the sort! Fudge! I don't believe a word of it."

"Very well, then, in that case I shall have to treat you as I do everyone that I encounter who denies me as you have."

With these words, and before the constable could have the least idea of what Dick's intentions were, our friend slipped from his horse, and caught the constable by the throat.

"Hands off," cried the constable—"hands off, I say!"

"Ho, no," said Dick—"you shall be punished. I will make a bird of you!"

The constable glared in surprise.

Dick had been careful to assume in his tone and manner a certain amount of wildness, which began to impress the constable in a manner that he intended it should—namely, that the constable had a madman to deal with.

"I will degrade you from your office!" said Dick, with increasing wildness. "You shall be a constable no longer! I will strip off your uniform! Hark! Did you hear that?"

"W-hat?" stammered the constable, in genuine alarm for, like most people, he had a great horror of lunatics, and by no means relished the prospect of an adventure with one in that lonely field.

"Hark!" repeated Dick. "I ask you again, can you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The moon," said Dick, with deep solemnity. "It tells me that I am right. It tells me to go on and punish you as you deserve."

As quick as thought, Dick produced a pistol—so quickly that the constable could not, for the life of him, make out where it had come from.

No sooner, however, did Dick present it at him than he dropped down suddenly upon his knees in the clayey mud, and roared lustily:

"Oh, murder—murder! Help—help! Here—murder!"

"If you raise your voice again," said Dick, in determined accents, "you are a dead man, so mind that! I tell you you shall suffer for your offence. Obey me—refuse me if you dare! Off with your hat—pull it off at once!"

The constable complied with a quickness quite astonishing.

But the fact was he, fully believing Dick to be mad, had made up his mind to comply with every demand that he could, in the hope that by this means he should be able to get away.

"Your wig as well," said Dick, who noticed that the constable endeavored to fix this article properly in its place.

It was given up without a murmur.

"Quick!" he continued. "Your cloak, coat, and waistcoat! Do you dare to hesitate and falter, villain? In another moment—"

Dick did not finish his sentence by words, but very suggestively brought his pistol to full cock.

The clicking sound thus made immediately increased the terror under which the constable labored.

Never before had he divested himself of his apparel with so much dexterity and speed.

Dick took the articles one by one, placing them carefully across his arm.

The reader no doubt guesses what was his intention.

It was to obtain from this man these upper outer articles of clothing in order to disguise himself, and yet to obtain them in a manner that would not lead anyone to suspect the purpose for which he required them.

He had now got all he wanted, and nothing remained but to frighten the constable away.

The poor wretch was now shivering, and his teeth were chattering, half with cold and half with fright.

"Quick!" Dick continued—"off with the rest of your things, then you shall roll yourself over and over in the mud until I tell you to stop. Hark again! Don't you hear the moon that commands me to make a bird of you?"

If the constable had had doubts lingering in his mind as to Dick's sanity they no longer existed.

Now he was impressed also with the belief that he was in imminent danger of his life, and therefore resolved to pluck up his courage, and make a bold rush and endeavor to escape.

This was just what Dick had calculated upon.

With a loud shout, then, the constable turned round, and once more set to work to run across the ploughed field.

Dick called after him to stop, and made a feint of pursuing him.

But the constable ran on all the more swiftly.

Deeper and deeper sank his boots in the soft, miry ground, until at last his feet came out of them entirely.

But, heedless of this, he continued his headlong course, leaving them sticking up behind him.

He staggered, stumbled, and fell; he rolled over more than once, and when, after many efforts, he succeeded in gaining his feet, he did indeed present a most pitiable aspect.

Dick watched him for some time, then perceiving in the distance that lights were moving about hither and thither, he guessed the alarm had been given, and resolved to lose no more time in taking his departure.

Nevertheless, he laughed so heartily at the constable's condition, that he could scarcely scramble into the saddle.

He tied all the articles of clothing up into the cloak, with the resolve to attire himself in them as soon as he had a good opportunity.

The constable, floundering on, and, in his excitement, quite blind to all objects in his path, ran headlong into a ditch, and long before those who had been aroused by his cries came and helped him out of it, Dick had left the ploughed field a long way behind him.

"Fortune favors me," he cried, in an exultant tone, as Black Bess leaped over a low hedge into the high-road. "Aha! it has been a good joke! I felt in need of a good laugh about something; but I shall take my success in this matter as an omen of what is to follow. Dressed in these things, I believe I shall be able to disguise myself effectually."

This little adventure had, however, run away with a good deal of time, and so, as the firm, hard road was lying beneath Black Bess's feet, Dick urged his mare to a little better speed.

While journeying on, however, he looked keenly about him in search of some place to which he could retire and make the requisite change in his apparel.

In this matter luck again appeared to befriended him, for before he had gone far he perceived a small, broken-down, ruined shed.

So far as he could tell, it was empty and deserted, and here he determined to remain for a few moments, and don the constable's apparel.

He listened, but all was still, and without further hesitation he entered the shed.

He fancied he heard a slight movement, but was not certain.

Evidently, however, he did not consider it worth taking any notice of, for, untying his bundle, he put on first of all the huge waistcoat with its large flap pockets, and after that the coat.

The constable was so much stouter than Dick, that these articles went on easily over the highwayman's ordinary apparel, and when the cloak, wig, and gold-laced hat were added, the metamorphosis was complete.

In such an eminently parochial-looking individual as he now appeared, no one would think of looking for the daring highwayman, Dick Turpin.

CHAPTER CMLXXV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN PARTS WITH BLACK BESS, AND FINDS THAT HIS DISGUISE IS BY NO MEANS PERFECT.

Just as Dick had finished making these changes in his appearance, the slight noise was again heard, only this time it was more unmistakable.

"Who's there?" Turpin cried, turning round quickly. "Speak—who are you?"

"What's that to you?" said a growling voice.

"Who are you?" said Dick, again. "And beware how you trifle with me!"

"You be blowed!" said the voice, again. "I should just like to know what you have been togging yourself up in those things for? Dark as it is, I need you."

"Did you indeed?" said Dick. "Then I'll see you in return, though, if you have no objection, we will have a little light on the subject."

A hasty movement followed these words.

As we have often stated, Dick took good care never to be without the means of procuring a light.

He had not been long in learning the absolute necessity there was for this.

On the present occasion he quickly ignited one of the small pieces of wax taper that he always carried about him, and as he held it above his head it diffused quite light enough to illuminate the interior of that ruined shed.

Lying in one corner, covered over by a heap of rags and straw, was what beyond all doubt was a human being, though of what sex it was impossible to discover, though the voice had decidedly a masculine tone.

"I don't know you," said Dick, "and you need not know me. I thought I had the place all to myself. However, if you like to hold your tongue about what you have seen, and say nothing about it, you can have this for a reward."

As he spoke, he tossed a guinea in the direction of the miserable object in the straw, and no sooner had he done so than he turned abruptly on his heel, and mounted Black Bess as quickly as he was able.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "I am vexed that, after all the precautions I have taken, some one should actually see me assume this disguise; and yet what have I to fear from such a miserable object as that was? Bah! the matter is not worth another second's thought!"

But although he said this, he could not banish the remembrance from his mind, nor could he help it making him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

But soon afterwards his attention was diverted, for, happening to look along the road before him, he perceived the figure of some person on horseback.

The animal appeared to be a very spirited one, for it was prancing and curvetting, and rearing in a manner dangerous to any inexperienced rider, as the person on his back clearly seemed to be.

"He'll be off," ejaculated Dick, after watching the movements of the horse and rider for a few seconds—"he'll be off—I know he will! By Jove, there he is!"

Just while he spoke, the horse, by a sudden movement, succeeded in unseating its rider, who fell with a heavy, disagreeable crash to the earth.

Luckily, the rider's feet were not entangled in the stirrups, and, what was odder of all, the horse, having, as one might say, accomplished his purpose, stood perfectly still.

All this appeared very odd to Dick, who, however, accelerated Black Bess's speed in order to reach the scene of accident, and ascertain whether the stranger was seriously hurt or not, and in any case to proffer assistance.

The horse appeared to view Dick's approach with considerable distrust, and once seemed ready to start off at full speed.

Dick noticed it, and resolved not to allow the animal the chance of doing so if he could help it, so, with considerable adroitness, he seized hold of the rein, and secured it to the branch of a tree.

This done, he turned his attention to the stranger, who still lay immovable upon the ground, just in the same position as he had fallen.

Dick stooped down over him, and then saw that the figure was slim, and the face young and almost too delicate-looking for a man's.

The costume of this young man was, however, very rich indeed, and Dick concluded at once that he belonged to some high family, for among the upper ranks of society such an effeminacy of appearance was by no means uncommon.

"Are you much hurt, young sir?" said Dick, bending down over him. "Do you think you will be able to rise with my assistance?"

Not a word was given in reply to this speech, and Dick began to fear that this young horseman had met with a death.

Placing his hand at the back of his neck, however, Dick, by an effort of strength, raised him 'o a sitting posture.

As he did so, the cap worn by the young stranger was removed, and then immediately a quantity of hair showered down, covering at once his head and neck, and falling far on to the shoulders.

This surprised Dick not a little, and the ejaculation that he gave utterance to upon making the discovery seemed to have the effect of arousing the stranger, who, in a low, faint voice, said:

"Help—help—oh, help me and save me!"

The tones of this voice were inexpressibly sweet and touching; and if Dick had required any further proof than the abundance of hair as to the sex of this stranger, the voice would have been sufficient.

"I will help you," said Dick, in a reassuring voice, "and save you if I can. Do you remember your horse threw you?"

"Yes—yes," said the young girl, for such, in truth, she was; "I remember all now, and—"

She started, and even in the semi-darkness Dick could tell that her fair, pale countenance was suffused by a deep blush.

Dick affected to take no notice of it, and he spoke as though he had not guessed the stranger's secret.

"I trust, young sir," he said, "that you are not very dangerously hurt. Do you think, with a little aid from me, you would be able to remount your horse?"

The young girl exhibited many traces of agitation, and endeavored to rise to her feet.

By Dick's assistance she was enabled to do so, and then she limped slowly and painfully towards the spot where he had fastened up her steed.

"I am a little hurt," she said. "I feel bruised and shaken, and my ankle is sprained, I think, but nothing more than that. Many thanks, sir, for the services you have rendered."

"It is not worthy of a thought," said Dick. "But do you not think you are running considerable risk by remounting that spirited creature? He seems to me far beyond your strength."

"Perhaps he may be," was the answer; "but he will probably be calmer now—at any rate, I have no other resource: I dare not linger here."

The young girl tried to mount while she spoke these words, but it is questionable whether she would have succeeded but for the aid Dick afforded her.

"Many thanks, sir," she said again—"many thanks!" "Here is your hat," said Dick, picking it from the ground; "you had better put it on."

She took it from him, and was about to place it on her head, when she stopped suddenly, for she had discovered that her hair, which she had so carefully concealed beneath it, was flowing over her shoulders.

In the excitement under which she labored she had not noticed this before, but upon making the discovery she believed that Dick must have penetrated her secret.

She was overcome with confusion, but with a great effort she spoke:

"You have behaved so kindly to me, sir," she said, "that I am anxious to stand well in your opinion. How strangely you must think of me to see me in this garb; but, believe me, nothing but the most urgent motives would have induced me to set out thus attired, and even now I almost shrink from what I have to do."

There was a tone of deep sadness in her voice, which she endeavored to control.

Dick simply bowed, and with increasing hesitation the young girl continued:

"I have known much sorrow and much suffering. It has all been caused by one who—who I have come forth to seek to-night. I shall find him," she added, with a deep, long-drawn sigh—"I know I shall find him; but, alas! for me, I—"

Unable to continue any longer in her broken communication, she stopped with more suddenness than Dick had anticipated.

However, she recovered, and looking up to him, she said: "Farewell, sir—good-night; we shall never meet again; but still, I shall always remember the kind way in which you have treated and spoken to me."

Scarcely had she finished speaking, these words than she touched her horse lightly with the spur.

The animal gave a sudden bound, then darted off at full gallop down the road.

Dick stood for a moment perfectly still, gazing after the flying form.

"This is odd enough," he murmured, at length. "There's a mystery there—a strange one too: I would give much to unravel it. I will follow her. Yes—yes, I will follow her; I may be able to render her some assistance."

Dick went a few paces in this direction, which was opposite to the one he ought to take.

But he stopped and muttered:

"No—no, hard as it is to restrain myself, I feel that this is not the time to look after an adventure; I have enough to do before me; besides, she has gone; I may not be able to overtake her—at any rate, for the sake of poor Tom Davis I will not make the trial."

Having thus come to a determination, Dick turned Black Bess's head round, and, dropping the reins upon her neck, urged her forward with his voice.

A few minutes soon took him a considerable distance from the spot where he had met with this strange adventure.

He was now drawing near to London, and, finding such was the case, he relaxed his speed, for he was reminded that as yet he had not come to any definite arrangement as to his proceedings.

"It will never do," he muttered, "to ride through London attired like this, and with Black Bess beneath me. No, no—that will never do! Black Bess would be recognised beyond all doubt. Yet dare I part with her? and, if so, where could she remain?"

These were harassing and perplexing questions, and they cost Dick much thought and consideration before he could come to a conclusion with respect to them.

But while cogitating, he happened to remember that near the entrance to Piccadilly was a small public-house, situate in a narrow street turning out of the thoroughfare just named.

The place was one of a retired description, and he questioned very much whether the people there in whose charge he would leave his mare would recognise her.

At any rate, Dick could think of no better mode of disposing of Black Bess, and so he resolved, without any more hesitation, to adopt it.

When he rode up to the inn, he found that the front of it was in darkness.

Over the gate leading to the stable-yard, however, a dim light was burning.

He pulled away at the handle of the bell, and, after some little delay, a man appeared, who was so busy rubbing the sleep out of his eyes that he could scarcely see anything.

He winked and blinked like an owl.

"Here's this horse," said Dick. "I want you just to pay a little attention to it for a short time, and have it ready when I call. I am not going far, and if you serve me faithfully you will be well rewarded."

"All right, sir!" said the man, who was too sleepy to trouble himself even to take a second glance at the highwayman.

In quite a mechanical way he took hold of Black Bess by the bridle, and led her through the gateway.

The door closed heavily, and no sooner was it shut than Dick wished he had passed through along with his mare, and ascertained the spot where she had been bestowed.

This was now too late, and, moreover, he thought perhaps it was quite as well that he had remained outside, for if he entered he might confront some one else, and then there would be the danger of recognition.

He felt if he remained lingering near the inn he should regret what he had done, and therefore, with a hurried step, he turned away.

"I will soon be back," he muttered, "or I will send some one for Black Bess, if I fancy there is any danger in going myself. There's plenty of time to think about that, though. I wonder how I look in my disguise? Do I resemble a parish constable, I wonder? I think so. Ah, that will not do—no, certainly not!"

While he had been speaking, Dick, in accordance with a habit of his, had stroked the lower part of his face, and in doing so his hand had passed over his moustache, which caused him to give utterance to the last words.

"Confound it!" he said. "I forgot that my moustache will spoil it all! Who ever saw a constable with such an appendage? No, no—it will never do to remain so! I must find some means or other of getting it removed." This was likely to be a matter of no ordinary difficulty.

It was necessary that it should be removed at once, for he could not tell how soon he should be met by some one or other.

He could not remove it himself, and the hour was so late a one that there was a very slight probability indeed that he would be able to find any barber's shop open, even if he had felt inclined to run the risk of entering one.

CHAPTER CMLXXVI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN MANAGES TO GET RID OF HIS MOUSTACHE IN A VERY CLEVER MANNER.

BUT the more Dick Turpin pondered over this matter, the more he felt the necessity of having his moustache removed.

It was altogether incongruous with his disguise.

He had just reached this point in his reflections, when he caught sight, at some little distance off up the street along which he was hastening, a feeble gleam of light.

On coming nearer, what was his surprise to perceive that the light actually came from a barber's shop.

He paused outside irresolutely.

Really it seemed as though chance had directed his footsteps to that very spot, and he was conscious that if he allowed this opportunity to slip by him he would not have another presented to him.

Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to walk boldly into the shop; but he stopped outside the window, and by peeping in between the various objects it contained, endeavored to get a view of the interior of the shop.

While he was so engaged, he heard a footstep near at hand.

He looked up and caught sight of a thin, little-sized man, with a remarkable-looking, pointed chin, approaching.

He ran into the shop in what was certainly a most furious manner, and no sooner had he entered it and glanced all around than he uttered several strange cries, all of which were in the strongest degree indicative of violent rage.

Dick was amused at his proceedings, and continued to watch him with great anxiety.

"I'll be the death of him!" said this man, as he pulled off his coat, and flung it down in a passion—"I'll be the death of him! I'll—I'll—"

He stopped, and made a frantic rush to a drawer, from which, in the twinkling of an eye, he produced a razor, which he began to strap rapidly on the palm of his hand.

The noise he had made evidently attracted the attention of some other persons in the house, for just then an inner door was timidly opened to the extent of about a couple of inches, and a woman's face appeared.

The barber—for such no doubt he was—uttered a howl.

"Where's that villain Sam?" he roared—"Where is he?—where's he gone?"

"Lor, Mr. Goodge, how in the world should I know? He's such an awful boy that is!" replied the woman, in a remarkably mild tone of voice, which contrasted strongly with the barber's infuriated accents.

"I'll be the death of him!" he repeated. "Let me ask you, ma'am, whether I did not leave him in my shop with particular directions as to what he was to do? Didn't I say that as soon as nine o'clock came he was to shut up the shop and go home—didn't I tell him all that?"

"I believe you did, sir?"

"Of course I did! And now here I come home at this unearthly hour and find the shop staring wide open, and that villain nowhere to be found. But let me get hold of him—only let me get hold of him, and I'll finish him!"

The barber accompanied these words with such a fendish look, that the woman, thoroughly alarmed, vanished immediately from the door.

"Then the cause of the shop being opened is explained," thought Dick, who had heard every word of this conversation. "What an odd chance! I'll warrant there's

not another barber's shop open in London. I'll enter here at all risks; perhaps in his excited state I can work upon him a little."

With these words, Dick approached the door, and only just in time, for the barber was beginning to think about closing his shop.

Dick stood just on the threshold, and projected only his head and the upper part of his body into the shop.

"Good morning—good morning!" he said, assuming a peculiarly vacant smile, and making an odd grimace—"good morning, Mr. Goodge! I am the Prince of Wales. How do you do, eh? Seen the moon lately?"

To say that the barber was astonished by Dick's sudden appearance and his extraordinary words would not be to say much.

So overcome was he that he could do nothing but stagger back a few paces, and goggle his eyes frightfully.

Dick availed himself of the opportunity to slip inside the shop.

He closed the door behind him, and as he did so he noticed that the key was sticking in the lock.

He turned it round, and removed it at once, then coolly consigned it to his pocket.

"Murder!" said the barber, in a faint, exhausted voice—"oh, murder! This is a madman escaped from some asylum! What shall I do?"

Dick certainly simulated the manner of an insane person to great perfection.

The barber was completely deceived by it.

Putting on a most mysterious aspect, and extending one hand before him, Dick approached the barber, who gradually retreated until he was brought up by the wall, and found himself unable to go any further.

Then Dick took hold of him by the collar of his coat, and placed his lips close to his ear.

"Hush!" he said "Do you wish to know what must be done?"

"No—no!"

"I have made a vow—yes, I repeat it—a vow. It was that the first man I met should either shave me or let me shave him."

With these words, Dick pounced suddenly upon a razor which his keen eyes had detected lying close at hand.

He flourished it in the air in a most alarming manner, as he continued, with additional excitement:

"Come on, I am ready—I am armed! Sit down, and I will shave you as you were never shaved before!"

The prospect of this operation horrified the barber beyond all measure.

The bare thought of sitting down in a chair at the mercy of a lunatic who held a razor was too horrible to bear reflection.

"No, no, my good sir," he said, with chattering teeth and trembling knees—"my very good sir—"

"Wretch!—dastard! do you know what you are saying?" cried Dick, pretending all at once to fall into an ungovernable rage. "Is that the way you address me, you miserable, chin-scraping wretch?"

"I beg your pardon," said the barber, who, having heard that the best way of treating lunatics was to comply as far as possible with all their wishes—"I humbly beg your pardon, your Royal Highness! I hope you will forgive me!"

"Ah, good!" said Dick. "Now, then, down in the chair with you at once!"

"But, your Royal Highness," said the barber, bowing and scraping at every word, though he was so horribly afraid that he scarcely knew what he said, "may I call your Royal Highness's attention to the fact that I am already clean shaved—that there is not so much as the ghost of a bristle anywhere on my face?"

"No matter," said Dick—"the razor will go all the more easily!"

"But did not your Royal Highness say something about being shaved yourself? Suppose, now, you allowed me to remove that untidy moustache on your lip?"

"Yes, yes—of course!" said Dick. "That's what I meant! How dare you dispute my commands? Quick—come here at once! I have no time to lose!"

These were welcome words indeed for the barber, and he made up his mind to shave his disagreeable customer as quickly as he could, and then trust to his ingenuity to get him out of the shop.

He was not without a hope that he would depart quietly.

This was just the frame of mind that Dick Turpin wished to bring him into, so he put down the razor, and calmly seated himself in the chair.

But while doing this, as the reader may easily believe, he kept the keenest possible eye that he could upon the movements of the barber, for it was quite likely that individual would summon the assistance of his neighbors, and endeavor to capture the supposed lunatic.

"Come on!" he cried, furiously—"come on. How long do you intend to keep me waiting?"

Fearing some act of violence, the barber replied, most civilly:

"Now, your Royal Highness—I am coming now—I shall not be another second."

He bustled about, and made his preparations.

As soon as the barber approached the chair, Dick cried:

"Ah, villain! I read your purpose in your eyes—I know the intention in your mind! You mean to shave off my eyebrows!"

"Nothing of the kind, your Royal Highness—nothing of the kind," said the barber. "If you would allow me to say so, that is entirely a mistake on your Royal Highness's part, as I will soon convince you."

Dick leaned back, pretending to take upon himself a quiet mood, as mad people sometimes do.

The barber, trembling all over, inwardly cursing his apprentice, to whose door he laid this disagreeable adventure, bent himself to the task of shaving his customer with all possible dexterity—in fact, in less than a minute Dick found himself entirely divested of his moustache.

He happened to catch sight of himself in a glass that was opposite, and was struck immediately by the great difference it made to his appearance.

"Performed!" said Dick, with a wild shout, as he sprang to his feet—"performed—the deed is performed! Come, rascal—a towel!"

This article was handed to him, on which he wiped his face carefully.

"Dear me," Dick said, by way of giving the barber a parting fright, "I feel dreadfully hungry! I must have something to eat. Have you such a thing as a baby in the house?"

The barber turned pale with fear.

"I must have a baby!" continued Dick, making a horrible sound with his mouth. "Is there one in the house, eh?"

"No—no," stammered the barber, desperately, "I think if your Royal Highness would only try next door you will find that they have one that will exactly suit you."

"Ah!" said Dick, suddenly, "next door, of course! I will go there."

The barber gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

Dick produced the key from his pocket, opened the door quickly, and passed out.

No sooner, however, had he crossed the threshold than the barber turned the key in the lock once more, and then, not content with that amount of security, drew a couple of bolts, and put up a bar.

"Thank goodness," he ejaculated, as he sank, limp and half-fainting, into a chair—"thank goodness he is gone! Oh, the dreadful wretch!—the villain! I shall always be frightened to death to be in the shop of a night after this! But it's Sam's fault—I'll pay him out for it tomorrow!"

The change that came over Dick's appearance as soon as the barber's door was closed behind him was truly remarkable.

Stroking his face and adjusting his apparel, he murmured:

"I rather think I have managed that little affair with some cleverness. At any rate, I'll wager the barber will never suspect who he has done such a service for."

With these words, Dick strode hastily onward, for the hour was a late one, or rather an early one, and he was anxious to reach the White Horse without delay.

The streets were almost deserted; but the few people he met did not even trouble themselves to give a second glance at him, which was a source of considerable satisfaction to the highwayman, for it filled him with the hope

that he should be able to carry out his mission successfully.

Soon after this he found himself near to Drury Lane, and then began to wonder what steps he should take in order to gain admission to Old Matthew's house.

Certainly there was the little secret door in White Horse Yard; but then that would doubtless be watched, and should he be seen entering by stealth, suspicion would at once be aroused.

This consideration made him determine to ~~was~~ bold'y up to the inn to push open the door, enter, and walk up to the bar without heeding who might be there.

This was certainly a very bold plan of operations; but then its very boldness was well calculated to carry success along with it.

Having come to this decision, Dick evinced no hesitation.

The oil lamp was burning outside the front door of the inn as usual, and through the swinging half-glass door placed a little way down the passage came another dim and feeble ray of light.

CHAPTER CMLXXVII

OLD MATTHEW PENETRATES DICK TURPIN'S DISGUISE.

"THERE is certainly a slight surprise in store for Old Matthew," said Dick, as, after a hasty glance up and down the street, he crossed the threshold of the White Horse. "At any rate, I will test the efficiency of my disguise. If he fails to recognise me, I shall have the greatest amount of confidence in it."

These thoughts passed through Dick's mind as he pushed open the swinging door we have just mentioned, and which brought him at once into full view of the bar.

Here he was rejoiced to find Old Matthew standing alone, busily engaged in decanting some liquid from one bottle to another.

Dick marched up to the counter with a step very different to his usual one.

Then pausing, he said, in a sharp, cracked voice:

"Mr. Gale, consider yourself in custody!"

Old Matthew, hearing these words, naturally enough gave a great start, and turned round.

He looked Dick full in the face for some moments without saying a word, and while he did so his countenance wore a very puzzled look.

At length the expression of the features changed entirely, and winking his eye, and at the same time shaking his head, he exclaimed:

"No, no, Dick—it won't do, though I am willing to surrender to you whenever you wish it."

"You know me, then?" said Turpin, as he gave a hasty glance around, in order to ascertain that no listeners were near.

"Yes, I know you, of course," said Matthew, coming forward, and shaking him by the hand. "At first, I do confess, I was puzzled. The absence of your moustache makes a wonderful difference to your face. But where on earth did you get that strange costume?"

"I will tell you all about it, Matthew, and plenty more besides—that is if we can only have the opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other."

"Well, we'll try."

"Have you been much troubled by the officers lately?"

"No, not much—very little. After that last adventure of yours, I almost think that they have made up their minds that the wisest thing they can do is to let me alone."

"I hope they have," said Dick. "But where are you going to?"

"This way," said Matthew, who had quitted the bar. "I've got a comfortable room upstairs, and we can surely sit there and converse in private?"

"Will it be safe?"

"As safe as anywhere."

"Enough, Matthew. I have the greatest confidence in you, and place myself willingly in your hands. I know the great extent of your resources."

Old Matthew smiled, and it may be that the smile was one of satisfied vanity.

He preceded Dick up the old oaken staircase, and, push-

lung open a door at the top, he ushered his visitor into a small room plainly yet comfortably furnished.

Producing a light, Matthew ignited a lamp standing on the table.

Then he said, rapidly:

"Wait here a moment, Dick, while I run downstairs and leave the necessary instructions in case of an alarm. I will be back directly."

"And bring something with you," cried Dick.

"Yes, yes—never fear; but do not speak so loud."

With these words Matthew departed.

He was absent only a few minutes, yet to Dick it seemed a long time.

When he reappeared, he was carrying before him a huge tray, on which was set out a very tempting array of eatables and drinkables.

There, now," he cried, "what do you think of such a feast as that, and at a moment's notice, too? The fact is, I feel quite peckish myself, and shall have a good deal of pleasure in joining you."

Old Matthew was a very good hand with the knife and fork, and, no matter what time in the day or night it might be, he was generally ready to make a meal with anyone.

"I expected to astonish you much more by my arrival," said Dick, after a short pause, during which they had both been paying their respects to what they had before them.

"Very likely," answered Matthew; "but the truth is, I expected you."

"Expected me?"

"Yes—I have been looking for you for days and days past. I'll warrant I know your errand—it concerns Tom Davis. You are not the one to leave a friend in the lurch."

"Not by any means," said Dick. "You have guessed rightly—my intention is to get him out of his trouble, and I have come to you to ask you how to do it."

"Well, then," Matthew responded, "I can do that in a very few minutes; and before we proceed to that, I am determined to have from you an account of your late doings. You can be as brief as you like, but I must have it."

Dick knew that it would only be an utter waste of time to hesitate or to attempt to persuade old Matthew to postpone the account of his adventures.

Taking, therefore, what was the shortest way, Dick began abruptly, and, as briefly as ever he could, placed his old friend in possession of those facts with which the reader is already well acquainted.

By the time this was done the meal was over.

Drawing the chairs closer to the fire, they then set at rest the consideration of the business before them.

That the subject was an important one could be told by the very manner in which old Matthew filled and lighted his pipe and drew the first few whiffs.

"I've a good deal to tell you, Dick," he began, "and I may as well make a straightforward tale of it."

"By all means. Begin by telling me whether you communicated with him or not, according to our arrangement."

"If you will listen," said Matthew, "I will tell you all. And if you abstain from making interruptions, much time will be saved."

Dick simply nodded his head, and Matthew took this hint to proceed.

"When we parted on the last occasion," he said, "I just snatched a few hours' slumber, and the first thing the next morning went to a lawyer that I have had some dealings with, and who I knew to be a very clever fellow. I told him Tom Davis's exact position, said he was a friend of mine, and that I was anxious and willing to go to any expense in order to obtain the best talent on 's behalf when his trial took place."

"Good!" said Dick. "It would be impossible to act better than that."

"So I thought," answered Matthew, complacently. "You see I have found that, in a general way, as regards the law, if you have only got the money to pay for it you can obtain what you require, and so I had the strongest hopes for Tom Davis's safety."

"Then the lawyer has undertaken the case?"

"He has, and has had frequent interviews with Tom. He has told him what we intend to do on his behalf, and if this, the first attempt, fails, another will be made."

"He would be glad to learn," said Dick, "that he was not forgotten by his friends."

"He knows you too well to fear being forgotten," said Matthew. "But, however, I have not seen him myself—indeed, I have not made the attempt, for I fancied anything of the kind would only be a means of exciting suspicion."

"And perhaps of getting yourself into trouble," interrupted Dick.

"Very likely; and the lawyer expressly cautioned me against it."

"And what steps has this lawyer taken up to the present time?"

"Nothing further than to engage a most eminent counsel, who will do his best to get the three prisoners off. The charge against Tom is a very grave and serious one, and if they succeed in obtaining his acquittal they will fairly be entitled to a good round sum."

"And they shall have it," said Dick—"they shall have it!"

Matthew smiled at the emphasis with which he spoke.

"Why, what a foolish thing it would be," he said, "for anyone in whom you place trust to betray you; at the most, only a share of the reward would be received as the fruits of what they had done, whereas, by befriending you, they can at any time make sure of double the whole amount."

"That's very true," said Dick, "and I believe we have all owed our safety in a very great measure to that very circumstance. But the trial—when does that take place?"

"The assizes begin to-day," answered Matthew, "and the case is liable to be called on at any moment; it may stand over to the end of the week, and it may be commenced to-morrow morning."

"Indeed!" said Dick—"so soon as that? If so, that leaves a very little time for preparations."

"You are right," said Matthew. "And yet, after all, I hope in all sincerity it will take place in the morning."

"Why so?"

"Because then the state of suspense we are now in will be put an end to—we shall know then precisely what to do. If the lawyers fail, and they are all three sentenced to transportation, we must make up our minds how to set them free."

"Exactly," said Dick.

At this moment there came a gentle rap at the door of the room.

Old Matthew gave such a nervous start that he dropped his pipe, which broke into fragments on the hearth.

"Don't be alarmed, Dick," he said, rising to his feet and going to the door. "I think I know now what I am wanted for."

He turned the key as he spoke, for he had taken the precaution to lock the door.

Throwing it open on its hinges, he perceived the girl who assisted him standing on the threshold.

"You are wanted," she said, "by a gentleman downstairs."

"I thought so," said Matthew; "but at the moment I forgot."

"Who is it?" asked Dick.

"No one but the lawyer. He promised to call here to-night and let me know in case anything unusual should have occurred. I will be back again immediately; but, for safety's sake, just lock the door behind me."

Dick was not slow to comply with this request.

He waited in the utmost suspense, however, until the landlord returned.

He came back at length, bearing on his countenance a very portentous look.

"The news?" said Dick, hastily. "Do not keep me any longer; my impatience while you were absent grew so great, that I was almost ready to come down and join you in the consultation."

"Then be glad that you had the prudence to restrain yourself."

"But the news, Matthew—what have you heard?"

"Why, simply that the lawyer has ascertained that Tom Davis's case is put down for the first in the morning, and in all probability it will be taken then."

"And what time does the court open?"

"At ten o'clock."

"We have not many hours to wait then," continued Dick, "for it is already past midnight."

"So much the better," answered Matthew; "I am anxious for it to be over."

"Did the lawyer express an opinion?"

"Well, scarcely; but yet he alluded to the difficulties he had to deal with. The evidence is so confoundingly straightforward and clear that it is scarcely possible for the cleverest man to bother or confuse the brains of the jury, easy as it often is to do so."

"Rather more than nine hours," said Dick, musingly.

"A very short time—a very short time; not long enough to go and return."

"What are you musing about?" asked the land lord.

"Why," said Dick, "as the trial is to take place so soon, I will make the attempt to stay in London until it is over; but my companions and Maud will all be full of anxiety on my account, and I was wondering whether I could ride over and tell them all was well, and be back in time."

"Don't think of any such foolish proceeding," said Matthew. "You will be able to return before midnight to-morrow night, and they must endure their suspense till then as best they may."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a sigh; "yet I could have wished—"

"What?"

"That we had been able to communicate with them in some way."

"But how is it to be done?"

"Have you no one that you can trust to send upon such an expedition?"

"No one at all; and, believe me, Dick, I do not think the occasion sufficiently pressing to warrant you in letting anyone else into the secret of your present retreat."

"Perhaps not," answered Turpin. "At any rate, we will think no more about it."

"Wisely determined, I think. And now, Dick, as regards your staying here, I think, if you will only have the prudence to remain in this room, that all will be well. The attention of all the officers will be very much taken up by Tom Davis's trial—they will all want to know the result. For that reason, you can count upon the probability of being left here unmolested. Then, as soon as the verdict is pronounced, I will leave the court, and come here to you."

Dick was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"That's all very well, Matthew, but I have a word or two to say yet as regards the bargain. If I stay here, as I fully intend, I shall not be satisfied to keep close prisoner in this room; on the contrary, I have determined to go with you to the court, and be present at the trial myself."

Matthew started to his feet, and spoke angrily.

"You are mad, Dick—mad—quite mad! No one in his sober senses standing in your position would dream of such a proceeding!"

"I don't know that," said Dick. "I've done it before in safety; and I consider that I have rather a talent in disguises."

"But you surely do not think that mere change in your costume is sufficient?"

"No, I do not," was the reply; "but I have been thinking of that old friend of yours, who has been of assistance to me more than once before."

"You mean the old costumer in Bow Street?"

"I do. Believe me, Matthew, he will be able to disguise me so well that not even you could recognise me."

CHAPTER CMLXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF IN UNEXPECTED PERIL.

"Don't try it, Dick—don't try it! Take my advice, and abandon that at once."

But Turpin only shook his head resolutely.

"I am sorry to differ from you," he said, "and I like to follow your advice whenever I can, because I know it is good. On the present occasion I feel sure that if I underate the danger, you overrate it, and therefore I believe it will be safe for me to go."

"Well, Dick, you know a wilful man will always have

his own way. If you find yourself in the wrong you don't blame me."

"I won't, you may depend upon it. But in the event of such a thing, don't have any ill-feeling against me, but do your best once more to get me out of the scrape."

"Ah, Dick," said Matthew, more and more anxiously, "I feel impressed with the idea that if you are made a prisoner and confined in a cell it will be for good—no human aid will ever release you."

It was more the manner in which old Matthew spoke than the words he uttered that impressed the highwayman; nevertheless, while he spoke, Dick shuddered, though he tried hard to feel at ease.

"Come, Matthew," he said, abruptly, "may we consider this matter settled? If so, I will set out for the costumer's at once, otherwise it will be too late."

"I can't alter my opinions," returned the landlord.

"And I cannot bear the prospect of remaining in this room all day," said Dick, rising to his feet, "and, therefore, if you will go downstairs and see that the coast is clear I will take my departure."

"Only think," said Matthew, "that you in your position should have the audacity of thinking about paying a visit to a house situated nearly opposite the police station in Bow Street—certainly within sight of it!"

"That's the reason why it's the safest place in the world," returned the highwayman; "they would never give me credit for such a daring act as that."

"I don't know; they are getting used to your audacious tricks now; I do not believe they would be surprised at anything you did."

"Well—well, we may stay here talking for hours to come without advancing any further. Go now and see whether it will be safe for me to depart."

Very reluctantly indeed did old Matthew obey this request.

He was not absent very long, and when he came back he felt compelled to tell Dick the truth, for he had never deceived him yet, and so he said:

"All's well, Dick; if you wished it you could not have the coast clearer than it is now."

"Then I'm off."

Matthew gave a half sigh, and almost regretted his own open-mindedness, for he was aware that in all probability if he had told Dick there was danger abroad he would have abandoned his perilous enterprise.

But Dick rapidly put on his hat and wrapped the constable's cloak around him.

"Now, Matthew," he said, "not another word of discussion. Lead the way. If we linger only five minutes we may miss this desirable opportunity."

Without a word, Matthew walked from the room, Dick following closely at his heels.

"Leave me here," said the highwayman, as soon as the foot of the staircase was gained; "don't attempt to accompany me to the threshold. When I come back I shall be in a widely-different dress to this, you may depend, and so well disguised that even you, although knowing my intention, will be baffled."

"Have you made up your mind what disguise to take?"

"I have not; I shall be guided by the costumer."

"You cannot do better; he is a perfect master of his art."

"Then, for the present, farewell!"

With these words, Dick walked hastily along the passage, pushed open the swinging glass door, and the next moment was walking rapidly up Drury Lane.

The nearest way to his destination lay directly past the station in Bow Street, but, with all his daring, Dick had the prudence to avoid this route.

He made, instead, a considerable detour.

Entering Bow Street from the upper end, he crossed at once to the side on which the costumer's house was built, and a few hasty steps brought him before the door.

He remembered that in the door-post there was a little bell handle so well concealed among the carving that it required a keen eye to detect it.

Dick placed his hand upon it at once, and as he pulled it, the faint tinkling of a little bell reached his ears.

He waited, then, with some impatience for the door to be opened, and while doing so, he cast several stealthy glances across the road.



[DICK TURPIN AND THE OLD COSTUMIER.]

A little lower down on his left hand he could see an oil lamp burning.

This lamp hung over the doorway of the police-station. Straining his eyes, he fancied he could perceive several officers lounging near the doorway; but in this particular he might have been deceived by his imagination, for the night was dark.

No notice apparently being taken of his summons for admittance, he pulled the bell again; but this time, before the tinkling had time to die away, the door was opened, and the old costumier, only partially dressed, and carrying a lighted candle in his hand, appeared upon the threshold.

His eyes had a sleepy, vacant look, and he winked and blinked at the guttering candle in a manner ludicrous to behold, yet, for all that, he made out the form of his visitor.

Bowing low, according to his custom, he said:
No. 203.—BLACK BESS.

"Munificent sir, you are welcome. Enter!"

Dick lost not a moment in obeying, and when the front door was closed behind him, and he stood in the dark passage of this house, he felt that he was comparatively safe.

"You wish to avail yourself of my services, I suppose?" said the costumier.

"I do, and I wish you to put forth your utmost skill."

"I will do so willingly and gladly, for I do not forget the past. This way, sir—this way! Be good enough to follow me up the staircase."

Dick obeyed without the slightest hesitation, for he had the utmost trust in the old man's good faith.

Reaching the top of the first flight of stairs, the costumier led the way into a room which was in every part overstrewn with miscellaneous articles of all descriptions.

"The reward to be earned by this night's service is large," said Dick, as he seated himself upon a table, the only available seat he could find, "for I am about to set out upon an expedition of great danger, and my disguise must be complete."

The old man nodded.

"What would you choose?" he said.

"That I determine to leave to you. I consider that you would be best able to guide me."

The costumier appeared to fall into a fit of profound thought.

His eyes closed, and Dick looked with interest upon his strange, wrinkled physiognomy.

The muscles about the lower part of his face twitched strangely, and the highwayman wondered, yet little guessed, what was the nature of the old man's thoughts.

Opening his eyes at length, he said, as Dick fancied, with some confusion:

"What should you think of a sailor?—would the disguise suit you? Could you personate the character?"

Dick reflected a moment, and said:

"I believe I could—yes, I feel sure I could."

"Then," said the costumier, "I should think it would suit you admirably, for your foes would never think of looking for you in such a garb as that."

"True," said Dick—"quite true."

"Then you decide upon that?"

"I do."

"Well, then," said the old man, "if you will remain here for a few moments—perhaps, too, you won't mind being in the dark, for I have no other light—I will go down and fetch a few things that are requisite."

He said this hesitatingly and awkwardly, yet the cause of this might be that he was solicitous not to give offence to one who had proved himself to be so good a customer as Dick had.

"Very well," said Dick. "I don't mind the darkness in the least; but, above all things, make haste, for I can assure you I have no time to lose."

"I can fully understand that," was the reply, spoken hurriedly and hastily.

No sooner had the last words escaped his lips, than the old costumier picked up the candle and left the room.

He closed the door behind him.

Dick was then in utter darkness, save and except that underneath the door could be seen a bright line of light.

He remained perfectly still, listening to the creaking noise produced by the costumier descending the staircase.

Then, drawing a long breath, Dick said:

"I wonder what it is that ails me? What can there be in the atmosphere of this place that makes it so oppressive? All these old clothes, I suppose. Bah! it is enough to suffocate one! I'll open the door."

With these words, Dick slid off the table, and groped his way carefully to the doorway.

He had accurately noted its position, and so he gained it without coming into contact with any of the many objects with which the place was literally crammed.

The air upon the staircase seemed to his heated fancy to be in no degree purer than that in the room, and he seemed absolutely to be gasping for breath.

Then faintly, and coming from afar off, he could hear the murmur of a voice.

This was a circumstance that roused up all his energies at once.

He immediately became on the alert, and listened eagerly.

But although his sense of hearing was so acute, he was unable to distinguish anything besides a hollow, murmuring sound.

"Who can it be?" Dick thought. "I always fancied that the old costumier lived alone, and what should he have to say, I wonder? I'll find out."

It was purely upon the impulse of the moment that Dick acted. He did not wait to reflect upon his decision; but very slowly and stealthily began to descend the stairs, for he knew that at the lightest tread they creaked dismally.

There was a vague sensation of alarm in Turpin's breast—a sensation that increased every moment in intensity.

It may have been that his proximity to the station as Bow Street produced a certain amount of nervousness—a greater amount than he ordinarily felt.

Be the cause what it might, however, he was most certainly apprehensive of danger to himself, and so, step by step, he went down the old, worm-eaten staircase.

At length he paused.

The murmur of voices became more audible, and one word distinctly reached his ears.

Looking round the angle of the balusters, he perceived at some distance off the glimmer of a light.

From his position he fancied it came from the shop.

"Isaac—Isaac," said the voice, which Turpin had no difficulty in recognising as that of the old costumier—"Isaac—Isaac, got your sleepy eyes wider open. Are you sure you understand me?"

"Quite sure," said a growling voice, though the sound of it made Turpin aware that the speaker was a boy.

"Understand, Isaac," the old costumier added, in a lower key, "it's a fortune that you are going to make within the next half hour—a fortune—that is, enough for you to spend for the rest of your life."

"I quite understand," was the reply; "but what is it you want me to do?"

"Hush—hush—be quiet! There's some one above for whom a large reward is offered."

"You mean the chap that came here once before."

"I do, Isaac—your memory is good. His race must be nearly run now—he cannot last much longer. Such being the case, then, why may not I reap the benefit of his capture as well as anyone else?"

"Better—better!" said the growling voice. "You know that was what I said to you the time before."

"You did, and I have agreed to follow your advice; so now, as I have got all these things in readiness, slip out of the door across the road to the station. Just let the officers know that he is here, and that I am willing to give him up."

"All right," said the boy, and then there was a hasty movement.

"Stop—stop," cried the costumier—"not so much hurry! Wait and hear my full instructions, for the least indiscretion will ruin all."

"Then make haste," was the response. "If you stop down here much longer he will grow suspicious."

"Right, Isaac—that is very likely; but all I have to say is this: when you come back with the officers, enter as silently as you possibly can. Let them surround the house in case of accidents, and you come with the rest up the stairs, dash open the door suddenly, and you will, in all probability, find him seated in a chair, and me standing before him."

"All right," said the growling voice. "You do your part, and I'll do mine. I'm off!"

CHAPTER CMLXXIX.

DICK TURPIN TAKES A DESPERATE LEAP OVER THE HOUSE-TOPS.

DICK TURPIN was so unutterably astounded by this conversation that during its progress he had been unable to move a single limb.

The treachery of the old costumier was well calculated to have an overpowering effect upon him, for, to speak the truth, he had placed as much confidence in him almost as he had in old Matthew, and certainly after what had occurred Turpin would scarcely have been surprised should the latter prove treacherous too.

But he was warned by the increasing brilliancy of the light, and by the shuffling footsteps of the old man, that it would never do to remain any longer in his present position.

The question was, in what way should he act?—what would be the best step to take, and the one most calculated to insure his safety?

His first thought was to rush at full speed down the stairs, overturn the costumier, and immediately make his escape from the house; and perhaps this bold and violent course might have produced success; but Dick hesitated, and the chance was lost.

Not but what he had good cause for hesitation.

In thus precipitately leaving the house, some

would of necessity be created, and the police station was so near that the officers would be upon him, as one might say, immediately.

The old costumier began to ascend the staircase, and as he did so Dick went back step by step higher up, until he reached the doorway through which he had emerged.

Here he paused again in doubt, wondering whether he should wait there for the costumier, and then *seize* upon him and overpower him.

A second reflection told the highwayman that this course could produce no beneficial result, though it might enable him to wreak some punishment on the perfidious old man.

He felt, however, that to escape quickly was the chief thing, and a plan of operations suggesting itself to him just then, he turned round, and with rapid steps ascended the second flight of stairs.

He heard the old costumier enter the room, for so wrapped up was he in the consideration of the iniquity he was about to perpetrate, that he failed to hear the slight noise Dick made in ascending.

By whom the house was tenanted Dick had not the slightest idea.

A dim light coming from some unknown source enabled him to find his way tolerably well up the steep, old-fashioned staircase, until at length he reached the top.

While ascending the last flight, his hands had been busily groping in his pockets for the materials wherewith to produce a light; therefore, without any loss of time, he managed to ignite one of those small pieces of wax candle which once before that night had been of such service to him.

The dim light it afforded was, nevertheless, sufficient to light up the narrow, confined space in which he stood.

He found that, as he had fully expected, he had reached the top of the house, and was standing on a small square landing-place.

Looking up, he saw in the roof one of those small square openings covered with a trap door, with which almost every house in London is provided, to serve as a means of escape in case of fire.

A second glance showed him a short ladder lying close against the wall.

To seize it was the work of a moment, and while he was placing it in the necessary position, he heard that a great uproar was taking place in the lower part of the house.

"Never mind," he muttered, as he ascended the ladder rapidly, "I believe that I have yet got time."

He stopped at the top and drew back the bolts.

The trap-door was then quickly placed aside, and he found himself with the fresh air blowing down upon him. The candle was at this moment extinguished.

This did not matter, for he had no longer any occasion for its use.

"I can't fasten the door," Dick muttered, "and so put a stop to their progress in that way, but I will draw up the ladder, and that will make it more difficult for them to reach me."

He suited the action to the word, and sent the ladder sliding down over the tiles until it stopped short in the gutter.

He then began to look carefully around him, so as to make sure of taking the best route across the housetops, for, of course, his safety depended upon the course he chose.

Descending at length, he crawled slowly upon the tiles until he reached the centre ridge.

As he was passing over this, a tile, upon which one foot rested, was dislodged from its position, and so suddenly and unexpectedly that before he could save himself or even make an effort to do so, he was slipping at a fearful rate down the sloping roof.

He struggled violently, and strove to arrest his descent by grasping at the edges of the tiles.

But these did not afford him sufficient hold to enable him to stay his speed in the least.

Down he went, and such a shuddering horror took possession of him that he was unable to turn his eyes and look in the direction in which he was falling.

His heart ceased to beat, and a mist seemed to spread itself before his eyes.

Yet vainly and spasmodically clutching, he rolled down until he was brought up with great force and suddenness by the stone parapet, which most unquestionably saved his life.

Luckily, he struck against it feet foremost, and beyond a sharp shock and a slight pain, he felt none the worse for the accident.

Yet a moment elapsed before he could fully persuade himself that he was really saved.

Attracted by the noise evidently coming from below in the street, he cautiously raised himself from the gutter.

Then, prompted by an irrepressible impulse, he bent his head forward so as to look over the edge of the parapet.

To his surprise, he found that quite a crowd of people had collected, surrounding the costumier's door.

By that mysterious means which puzzles everybody, all those persons present had got to learn what was the matter.

Dick was satisfied with one hasty glance; then he shrank back, for there was just the possibility that one of those below looking up might discern his head, in which case a fresh alarm would be raised.

When Dick began again to crawl along the roofs, he became sensible of the fact that he had bruised himself dreadfully in many places, and when he moved his limbs he suffered considerable pain, which kept increasing each moment.

But his progress was now attended with a much greater amount of caution than at first, so, after all, the slight accident he met with was a fortunate event, inasmuch as it taught him the absolute necessity for caution.

In thus scrambling over the roofs, Dick had no settled idea further than that he might perhaps be able to gain an entrance to some house or other at some distance, and so descend to the street unperceived.

A thousand difficulties were in the way of this course; yet he crept on and on, though his pace grew slower in consequence of the pain in all his joints.

At last, with a sigh of disappointment, he stopped and looked despairingly around.

Just in front of him was a division between the housetops, not very wide, but its great height made the abyss look perfectly alarming.

That he could easily leap such a distance, Dick knew very well; but then he was bruised and shaken, and he shrank back with that dread which everyone experiences upon suddenly finding themselves in such a situation.

He looked back as though with the intention of retreating, but just then he heard many voices talking loudly, and directly afterwards a man crawled out of the trap-door from which he had so lately emerged.

Clearly the officers had found some way of reaching the roof independently of the ladder which Dick had so carefully removed.

They had also provided themselves with torches, which cast a bright, ruddy glare around for a considerable distance.

"It must be," said Dick, as he gathered himself up slowly—"it is my only chance. If I make the effort all will be well; but I question whether any of the officers will be bold enough to follow me."

He stepped up as he spoke on to the edge of the stone parapet, which was not more than a foot wide.

In doing so, he could not avoid glancing down to the ground below, and as he did so such a sensation of dizziness came over him that he almost lost his balance.

Between four and five feet distant from him was another parapet, similar in every respect to the one upon which he stood.

This he would have to clear so as to drop upon the roof beyond.

To take such a leap was terrible indeed.

Truly was it a leap for life, and one only to be taken by a man whose only chance of safety lay in doing so.

Dick prepared himself for the effort as best he could.

He gave one spring into the air, striving to forget that he was standing on the top of a high house, endeavoring to cheat his fancy into the belief that he was only on the level ground.

He alighted on the stone coping opposite.

His footing was insecure; he tottered and struggled for a balance.

For a second it seemed as though he must inevitably fall backwards into the abyss and be dashed to pieces; but by a sudden movement of the upper part of his body, Dick threw himself forward, and fell with considerable force upon the rough red tiles.

But he was safe, and that in a measure compensated for all that he had gone through.

He so far lost his consciousness in his fall as to feel an inclination to lie just where he was without moving a single limb; but the recollection that the officers were near to him enabled him to shake off this sensation of languor and depression.

Rising stealthily, he looked behind him, and staggered again when he beheld the dark black gulf he had overleaped.

The police officers had by this time all passed through the trap-door, and were making slow and careful progress across the housetops, for Dick had left no track behind him by which he could be followed, and he was now at so great a distance as to be out of the sphere of light afforded by their torches.

These indeed were more hindrance to the officers than good, for one hand was constantly kept occupied, leaving only the other to seize hold of the various projections in the roof.

But Dick, although in comparative safety, was anxious to crawl away to such a distance and in such a manner that the officers should lose all trace of him entirely, and with this view he crouched down again, so that his form was concealed by a parapet, and, almost on all-fours, crept along the narrow, slimy gutter.

Bending all his energies to the task he had set himself, Dick kept resolutely on his way; but at length, having gone, as he considered, a sufficient distance, he paused, and slowly rising to an upright posture, took a survey around him.

Although he was invisible to the officers, yet they were plainly to be seen by him, owing to the ruddy halo of light their torches cast around them.

By their manner, Dick could tell they paused at the edge of the abyss over which he had leaped, and he fancied by their gestures that an animated discussion was going on among them as to whether he had really passed that way or not.

Turning his eyes in the opposite direction, Dick perceived, several yards off, a dim, glimmering light.

At one moment it would be tolerably bright, and then it would fade away so as scarcely to be seen.

"That's from an attic window," he muttered, after a more attentive examination of it, "and I should imagine the light proceeds from a fire. I will creep towards it. Perhaps that will present me with an avenue of escape."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Dick set himself in motion.

It took but a short time to gain this attic window, but he approached with the utmost caution, for of course he could not tell whether the chamber was inhabited by anyone or not.

Reaching it at last, he paused and listened.

A tattered curtain was drawn partially across the window, but not so closely as to prevent him from taking a peep at the interior if he had chosen to do so.

But Dick did not attempt, for the very instant that he passed the sound of voices came upon his ears.

CHAPTER CMLXXX.

DICK ONCE MORE FINDS THAT AUDACITY COMMANDS SUCCESS.

Upon making this discovery, Dick's first impulse was to crawl away as silently and cautiously as he had arrived, but the words that first fell upon his ears so interested him that, despite the danger of his situation and the urgency there was of immediately moving, he involuntarily waited to hear more.

The voice that Dick heard speaking was evidently that of a young girl, for the tones were sweet and low, although her words were interrupted by frequent choking sobs, and although there was such a tone of anguish in it.

"Do not grieve so—do not weep so bitterly," she said. "Innocent though he was, yet you must have known what would have been the result; he was so entangled that

he could not escape. Do not weep, I say again, but be of better heart, and find consolation in the thought that though he has been pronounced guilty by his fellow-creatures, yet there is One who, knowing all, will acquit him of this fearful charge."

The girl was silent, and in the short pause that followed nothing could be heard but sobs and cries of lamentation.

"Girl," said another voice, and this one was of a character altogether different to the first, for it was shrill and piercing, and was indicative of the utmost mental agony and suffering—"girl, it is well and no doubt easy for you to preach, but such words as you utter bring no consolation to my breast; they may console you, for you cannot feel for him as I do, for I am his mother and he is my only one."

"That reproach is unjust—most unjust," was the quick reply; "but you can render him no aid by thus abandoning yourself to sorrow. You know that now the trial is over there is not the shadow of a hope—he will be sent away, and we shall never live to see him more."

While listening to this conversation, Dick had managed to raise himself a little, so as to be able to peep over the top of the tattered curtain we have mentioned, and as he did so a sad spectacle greeted his eyes.

The attic was small and destitute of nearly every article of furniture.

In the small rusty grate a few sticks were burning, which gave out by far more light than heat.

Crouching down on the floor near the hearthstone was the figure of an aged woman.

She was much emaciated, although Dick could see scarcely anything beside her long, bony arm and almost fleshless fingers.

Her gray hair was streaming in disorder upon her neck and shoulders; her face was completely concealed from view.

The young girl was standing in an attitude of easy, natural grace against the chimney-piece; her elbow was resting upon it, and her head supported by her hand.

Her cheeks were wet with tears, which continually flowed over them.

While gazing upon this scene and listening to what was said, Dick had thought of something which he considered might aid him to escape.

Before beginning to put his project into execution, he looked behind him once more, in order to observe the movements of the police officers.

They had left the parapet where they had been standing, and were busily engaged in dragging some apparently heavy object, but what it was Dick could not make out, nor did he particularly trouble himself to do so, for he had seen sufficient to make him aware that he might safely do what he intended.

Raising his hand, he tapped lightly against the window, and at the same time he placed his mouth close to a pane of glass which had been broken, and through which the sounds of voices had passed, otherwise he could not have heard so distinctly all that had been said.

"I am a friend," he cried, in a low voice. "Do not be alarmed—I have come to aid you."

Notwithstanding the assuring nature of these words, the two occupants of the garret both screamed, though, it must be said, only slightly.

The young girl was the first to recover herself from her astonishment.

With a quick step, she crossed the room and dashed the curtain on one side.

"Open the window," said Dick, "and let me enter. Believe me when I tell you I am a friend, and will do you a good service in return for one that you can render me."

"Alas, sir!" said the young girl, in sorrowful accents, as she unfastened the window, "if you look to obtain any service at our hands you will look in vain, for we are quite helpless."

"Not so," said Dick, as he stepped lightly into the room—"not so, and I will quickly prove it to you."

The old woman half rose up, and pushing the masses of hair off her face, looked scrutinisingly into the countenance of their mysterious visitor.

"I know the cause of your trouble," Dick said—"it is because one near and dear to both of you has been found guilty of a crime."

"It is, sir," said the young girl, quickly; "but, as we well know—though, alas! we could not prove it—he is quite innocent. The judge and the jury thought differently, however, and he is sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation."

"I will take your word for his innocence," said Dick. "I may as well confess to you that I have broken the laws—that the police officers are even now on my track. I look to you to assist me to escape."

"How can we, sir?" said the young girl, shrinking back—"how can we?"

"Easily," said Dick. "I only want you to conduct me noiselessly down the staircase, and let me out of the front door of the house; and, in return, I will pledge my word to use my best efforts to release the young man you speak of. There are those belonging to me who probably will be in the same condition as he is now, and I am determined that, in defiance of the laws, they shall be liberated. The same with this young man; and, in addition, I will put him in the way of leaving England secretly, and supply him with sufficient money to do so."

"It is a dream," said the old woman, speaking for the first time, and uttering her words in a shrieking, hysterical voice—"it is a dream—all a dream! You are not in earnest in what you say."

"But if I prove it," said Dick, quietly, "will you believe me, and will you do what I require?"

"I will."

Dick beckoned her to approach him, and then pointed out of the attic window.

What he saw filled Dick with some little surprise, and caused him to quicken his movements.

The bulky object which the police officers were dragging was evidently a broad plank, or something of that kind, which they could put across from one parapet to the other, and so continue their search over the housetops without hazarding that tremendous jump.

They had now effected the passage, and were fearfully close at hand.

"You see," said Dick, "they are police officers and searching closely for me; you see no time is to be lost. I tell you again I will set the young man free, and those who know Dick Turpin always say he keeps his word."

"Is that your name?" said the old woman, earnestly

"It is."

"Then I believe you," she answered. "Come with me—I have no fear that you will deceive me."

"I shall not. Let me fasten the window on the inner side. There, that will do. Now take me unperceived to the front door, and make all speed back to this room. If the officers speak to you or enter, make a great show of unfastening the window, and then tell them that you have not been disturbed."

The old woman nodded, and seemed so alarmed at the proximity of the officers, that she almost dragged the highwayman from the room.

The stairs were descended rapidly and noiselessly.

Many other persons were doubtless in the house; but, if so, Dick neither saw nor heard anything of them, while the passing of anyone up and down the stairs being heard would not be paid the least attention to.

In a very brief space of time the street-door was reached.

The old woman opened it, and looked forth before she allowed Dick to issue himself.

"The street is clear," she said. "You will escape unseen. Quick—quick, that I may return to the attic!"

"But the young man's name?" said Dick—"what is it? Tell me, and do not be afraid I shall forget."

"Philip Greythorpe."

Dick repeated it, and then said:

"Farewell, and many thanks for this service! If it lies in the power of mortal man to do what I have promised it shall be done!"

With these words he stepped quietly into the street, being careful to avoid all appearance of hurry or alarm.

The door was closed immediately behind him, and the old woman ascended to the attic.

Dick drew a long breath, and gave himself a hearty shake.

"That is what I call an excellent escape," he muttered, "and I fancy the officers will be puzzled not a

little at my extraordinary disappearance. Ah, by Jove, they are looking over the parapet!"

Dick could tell this by the broad glare of light that suddenly illuminated the dark thoroughfare in which he stood.

He walked on, however, with as much composure as before, though when he turned round the first corner he came to he felt a sensation of great relief.

He knew, then, that he was out of danger.

But the consideration presented itself to him of where he was to look for further shelter.

It is questionable whether anyone under such circumstances would have come so readily to a conclusion as Dick did, and still more questionable whether they would have adopted his course of action.

This was, in the coolest and most matter-of-fact manner possible to walk back agair to the White Horse in Drury Lane.

It was a path beset with dangers, for the officers would all be on the alert, and probably might jump to the conclusion that as Dick had escaped he had sought a refuge there at his old quarters.

But Dick did not allow this consideration to influence him in the least degree.

In the most unconcerned manner possible to conceive he walked at a steady rate along the almost deserted streets, taking care, however, to proceed to old Matthew's by the most roundabout way he could think of.

It was when he really entered Drury Lane that he began to glance somewhat apprehensively around him.

To his vexation, he perceived a police officer standing at no great distance, who, he fancied, eyed him suspiciously.

But Dick walked on as though he did not observe it—in fact, as though he was not troubling himself about anything going on around him.

Upon reaching the White Horse, he glanced up at the lamp over the doorway, and appeared to hesitate.

Then, just as though he was a chance passenger, and had made up his mind to call in for refreshment, he ascended the steps, and walked down the passage.

He was greeted with an exclamation which came from old Matthew, who was standing at the bar, and who, by his manner, was evidently on the look-out for him.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "What on earth can bring you back like that? But don't stop to answer me! Upstairs with you—upstairs! I can wait till then to hear your news."

Dick did not wait to be told twice, but ran up the staircase two or three steps at a time.

Old Matthew was not long behind him, though he entered the room rather out of breath.

"What has happened?" he cried, in genuine alarm "I heard a rumor that you had been captured in Bow Street."

Dick smiled.

"Then I am afraid," he said, "the person who told you did not speak the truth. In sober earnest I was very near it, I assure you."

"And have you been seen to enter here?" asked Matthew. "That's the question."

"I am afraid I have," was the reply, "and, if so, I shall look to you for safety."

Matthew gave a peculiar and reassuring smile as he said:

"Well, if there's any danger approaching, we shall have timely notice of it. Just oblige me by relating your adventures."

Dick complied readily enough.

But no words could convey any idea of the amount of amazement Matthew displayed upon learning the perfidy of the old costumier.

He was, in fact, at first incredulous, only Dick's narrative was of such a character as to leave no room for doubt.

"It was my narrowest escape," said Dick, "and more than once since then I have felt that if ever I got into serious trouble it will be by the perfidiousness of some one in whom I placed the utmost trust."

CHAPTER CMLXXXI.

DICK TURPIN IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH THE RESIDENCE OF TOM DAVIS'S TRAIL.

"THEN," replied old Matthew, very gravely, "you may make yourself quite sure, Dick, that I shall not be the one ever to betray you."

"I believe that," answered the Highwayman, grasping him by the hand—"I fully believe it; indeed, should you prove false I should lose all faith in human nature."

"But this is profitless talk," said Matthew. "Supposing, now, that I go downstairs for a minute and look round?—there can be no harm in that."

"But will it look suspicious?"

"I think not, and if there is any danger at hand I shall let you know it in good time."

Dick made no further opposition to this course.

Old Matthew was not absent long, but when he came back his face had rather a grave aspect.

"Is there danger?" asked Turpin.

"Not immediate," he replied, "but I hear there is a tremendous commotion going on in and about Bow Street."

"Are the officers still searching for me?"

"I believe they are—at any rate, they were a short time ago. Your mysterious disappearance puzzles them exceedingly, and they seem to be impressed with the idea that you are concealed in one of the houses there."

Dick gave a contented, satisfied smile.

"Now," said Matthew, "I will do my best to keep you in safety while you are beneath my roof. Look here."

Old Matthew went, as he spoke, to a large open cupboard which completely filled up a recess on one side of the fireplace.

He threw open the large double doors with which it was provided, and then it turned out that it was not really a cupboard but a closet.

Various articles of apparel were hanging around it on different nails and hooks fixed in the walls.

Apparently this closet was formed entirely of wood.

Matthew, first bespeaking Dick's attention, stepped into it.

"Now, Dick," he said, "there's a hiding-place here which I don't think even you could discover, even if you knew it to exist."

"Indeed," said Dick, "then that is saying a great deal in its favor."

"It is, and yet not more than it deserves. Look here."

As he spoke, old Matthew stooped down and inserted his fingers in between the floor and the bottom of the back of the cupboard, which did not fit so closely as to prevent him from introducing the tips of his fingers.

Putting out his utmost strength, Matthew then raised this back, just in the manner that one might raise the sash of a large window.

When this was done, a small chamber in the wall was discovered, and in it was a chair.

But the place looked as though it had never been pried into or entered for many years, for it was thickly loaded with dust, and everywhere huge cobwebs were suspended.

"What do you think of that?" said Matthew, as he stepped back to look at it with admiration.

"It is very good so far as security is concerned," said Dick, "but yet by no means a comfortable place to think of taking up one's quarters in."

"You are right enough there; but then, safety is the thing you have to consider."

"Just so. But how in the world, Matthew, came you to make this discovery?"

"Oh, I have known of it for a long time," was the reply. "The hiding-place has been made many, many years, and I firmly believe that it is now forgotten or unknown—at any rate, there is no other place in the whole house which holds forth so good a prospect of affording safe shelter."

"I shall take your word, Matthew," replied Dick, "and be guided by you entirely."

"You cannot do better, though I say it. Now, what I have to tell you is this: Whenever you receive any intimation of coming danger, quit this room; be careful to leave no token of your presence behind you, and enter this chamber—then I firmly believe that the officers will depart without finding you."

"So do I."

"Then, the next thing I have to say," resumed Matthew, "is, that I am going to shr / up the house for the night. I feel the want of sleep, and I shall be able to snatch a few hours before morning; so will you, for when I fasten up the house at night I do it in so secure a manner that no one could enter it unawares."

"That is enough," said Dick—"indeed, to tell you the truth, whenever I am here I feel as though I am within a strongly-fortified castle."

Matthew laughed at this idea and left the room, leaving Dick to compose himself as well as he could upon the couple of chairs which the apartment contained.

Dick drew them near the fire, and having got into as comfortable an attitude as circumstances would allow, he dropped off into a deep slumber.

He was aroused from it by a sudden disturbance of some kind in the street, and having ascertained what was the matter, he advanced cautiously to the window.

Looking down, he then saw a large crowd of people assembled, and among them a body of police officers.

They were all looking up at the front of the White Horse, and Dick began to feel that he should soon have to take up his quarters in the secret chamber.

To his surprise, however, the officers, after conferring with each other, departed.

Then, by degrees, the crowd dispersed as well, until the street was left in tolerable quiet.

As soon as this was the case, Dick heard a faint tap at the door, and directly afterwards old Matthew entered.

"Have you looked out, Dick?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "and I am puzzled at what I saw. What did you make of it?"

"Well, I may be wrong, but my idea is that the officers having failed to find you anywhere in the vicinity of Bow Street, have imagined that you have sought shelter here, but the quiet aspect of the place, now that it is shut up and in darkness, seems to have laid their suspicions."

"No doubt that is it," said Dick; "but, however, as morning cannot be far distant, I shall not attempt to sleep again."

"Nor shall I."

The remainder of the time was then spent by Matthew and Dick in discussion.

In the end, old Matthew, after a great deal of trouble, succeeded in persuading Dick Turpin that it would be best for him not to venture to Newgate—that, in fact, he was running a needless risk by doing so, and not doing the least good to anyone.

Secretly, Dick felt the full force of this, though he would not allow it.

He did not like on any occasion to change an opinion or a determination that he had formed.

Old Matthew carried the point, however, and having partaken of a good, substantial breakfast, he set out for the Old Bailey, leaving Dick to pass the time as best he might in the room alone.

Before the landlord departed, he again impressed upon the highwayman the necessity of seeking shelter in the secret room the moment the girl told him there was any occasion to do so.

"In fact," he said, "upon the approach of danger you will hear a bell ring violently; when you do, then, lose no time in concealing yourself."

Dick promised obedience, and his last words to old Matthew consisted of an earnest entreaty that he would return and let him know the result the moment the trial was concluded.

It was at quite an early hour when Matthew set out from his house; but then, he knew very well how much difficulty there was in forcing a way into the narrow, confined court at the Old Bailey, where the trials were held.

The first half-hour or so after his departure passed tolerably well to Dick, but after that time he began to grow impatient and restless, and continued to get more and more so as the day advanced.

He was yet, however, quite unmolested.

Beyond a doubt, the greater part of the police officers who had interested themselves in the capture of the highwayman were just then present at the Old Bailey, waiting the result of the trial with as much anxiety as any one.

Never, under any circumstances, had a day appeared to lag so fearfully as that.

Dick thought the hours would never slip away.

But, for all his impatience and restlessness, old Time pursued his march without the least wavering or alteration.

Noon came and passed; then, after a short period of daylight, night began to close in.

To such a degree had Dick worked himself, that more than once or twice he was on the verge of issuing forth, in order to come to a conclusion earlier.

It was, however, as nearly six o'clock as possible when old Matthew returned.

By the look of his face, Dick knew that he was not the bringer of good tidings.

"Well," he said, briskly, "I will not question you. Speak, Matthew, and put an end to this horrible suspense as soon as you can!"

"Well, Dick, the case came on the very first thing this morning, and occupied the court up to within a short time of my leaving."

"And the result?"

"Is just what I expected—or, indeed, not quite so bad."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I must tell you that a dead set was made against Tom Davis, and the attempt made to render what he had done a capital offence, so as to be punished with death. Luckily, by the efforts of the counsel I engaged, this was not successful."

"But why not come to the point at once?" said Dick. "What is his fate?"

"Twenty-one years' transportation."

"Twenty-one years?" repeated Dick. "Why, that's equivalent to transportation for life!"

"It is indeed. But don't chafe and fret so; wait until you have heard all, then we can talk over the matter, and if possible come to a decision."

"With all my heart."

"I shall never regret having taken the course I have," resumed old Matthew, "for by the efforts of the counsel Mrs. Davis and Ellen have escaped—when I say escaped, that is scarcely what I meant."

"They have been acquitted?"

"No, not that either, but sentenced to one month's imprisonment. For them you need not trouble; a month will quickly pass away—then they will receive their liberty in a legitimate manner."

"I am glad it is no worse for them," said Dick; "and yet you have no idea how much I regret even that. Still, as you say, they may be left; it is Tom Davis's case which demands our whole attention."

"You are quite right—it is," said Matthew. "And the question comes, in what possible way can we contrive to replace him in possession of his liberty?"

"I know not—I am too confused to think," said Dick; "I must leave all reflection to you."

"Well, it is certain," said old Matthew, "that if he is liberated by our aid he will have to leave England at once—that's the only course of safety open to him."

"And he will gladly enough embrace it," said Dick—"I feel sure of that. Once let him be free, and I will take care that all three of them have the means of quitting this country."

"Well," said Matthew, "and if I may add a few words of my own, I think while you are about it, the best thing you can do is to leave England too; you have run your career quite long enough. Take my advice—be satisfied with what you have done, and quit this land for ever."

Dick received this counsel with a smile.

"We'll talk about that another day," he said; "I have no humor to enter that discussion now."

"Well, be it so," said Matthew, somewhat sadly; "though, mark me, I should prefer that to the end of your career."

Dick drummed upon the table impatiently with his hand.

"Well, then," said Matthew, "let us consider the ways and means of setting Tom Davis at liberty. He is now in Newgate, where he will remain for some short period."

"And after that?" asked Dick.

"Why, in the usual course of things, he will be put

into a van or waggon along with the rest of the prisoners doomed with him, and taken, most probably, to Greenwich, where he will be put on board the convict ship."

"Well, Matthew, what is to be done, and when?"

"Ah, Dick! I cannot answer you that question; but I can very easily tell you what can *not* be done."

"And what may that be?"

"Why, liberate him from Newgate. From what was said at the court to-day, I feel sure that it is suspected that you and your comrades will make some attempt to set him free, and most-certainly if you approach anywhere near the Old Bailey you will doom yourself to your own destruction."

"So we may," said Dick; "but for all that, Tom Davis must be set free."

"He must," said Matthew, rubbing his hands together, while a pleased expression gradually stole over his face—"he must. I quite agree with you. Just at this moment I thought of the means by which, in all probability, it can be done."

CHAPTER CMLXXXII.

THE RECESS BEHIND THE CUPBOARD, IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HIDDEN, IS DISCOVERED BY THE OFFICERS.

"Do you mean it?" said Dick Turpin, with eager earnestness—"do you really mean it? Come—quick! Speak out—let me know your plan."

"Well," said Matthew, with much complacency, "it is only a rude idea at present, but yet it may be elaborated into something very good indeed."

"Well, well, pass over all that."

But old Matthew seemed rather to enjoy his anxiety, for instead of speaking directly to the point he went on:

"And, by-the-way, there is that young man."

"Confound the young man!"

"Well, it isn't very grateful to say so. I mean that young man that you promised to rescue."

"Well, well, what of him?"

"Why, I think my plan will enable you to set him at liberty at the same time as Tom Davis."

"Indeed!" said Dick. "How so?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I cannot, nor do I intend to try; I am waiting for you to tell me."

"Then I will dally with you no longer. The fact is, Dick, it occurs to me that it will be perfectly possible for you and your three comrades to stop the prisoners' van while on its way to Greenwich, or wherever the place may be, which I can easily find out and let you know."

"Good, Matthew," cried Dick—"very good! Of course we can. I might have thought of it, it is so simple, and I think so very likely to succeed."

"Very likely," said old Matthew—"in fact, I am certain, for if you only partially succeed, the prisoners will aid you to the very best of their power."

"It is a glorious plan, Matthew," cried Dick, enthusiastically and excitedly—"a glorious plan, and one that cannot fail of success—I feel sure of it, and a heavy load is taken off my mind. I can see the means by which Tom Davis can recover his liberty."

"I am glad you approve of it so well. But now while we are on the subject, let us come to this arrangement."

"Well, go on. Why did you pause?"

"Simply because I was considering. However, this cannot be done at present; but leave to me the task of finding out when the prisoners will be removed from Newgate, and to what place they are going to be taken."

"You can easily learn that, I should think, Matthew."

"Yes—very likely I can; but then, having done so, the question is, how shall I make you acquainted with the intelligence?"

"That's a point we must settle, said Dick. "Suppose I should come here again at the end of a certain time?"

"No—no," said Matthew, very slowly. "I am glad enough to see you, Dick—it delights me when I can catch sight of your face; but the less you show yourself here I am sure will be the better. Don't think of it."

"Well, then," Dick cried, "how do you propose to manage?"

"Why, by a very simple means. It will not do for me to arrange to meet you anywhere, because I feel sure that I never leave home on any occasion without being followed by the officers. I'll tell you what I can do. I will write a letter, and find a trusty messenger who will take it to some place that we agree upon between us, and leave it there for you to come and fetch it afterwards."

"That's a good plan, Matthew. We may as well agree to it at once. But where shall the place be?"

"I leave that to you."

Dick remained for several moments plunged in deep thought.

At length he exclaimed:

"Do you know the spot where the river Brent flows under the Edgware Road?"

"Yes—perfectly well."

"Then you may be aware, perhaps, that the old bridge is very much out of repair—most of the stones at the top are loose."

"I see."

"Well, then, let your messenger move the first stone he comes to that is loose as he walks on to the bridge, taking the left-hand side. He will then be able to put the letter, if folded small, either between that stone and the next, or else completely under it."

"Very good," said Matthew. "I quite understand. And now, as there is just the possibility that the letter will fall into some one else's hands, we will agree upon what is to be placed in it. If, as I quite expect, the prisoners are to be removed to Greenwich, I shall not name any place on the letter at all, but will simply write a figure, which will represent the hour when the van will start from Newgate, and immediately after that will be another figure, which will represent the day of the month on which they will set forth."

"That is quite enough," said Dick, "so that these figures are all the paper need contain."

"Yes, all, and then if anyone else finds it, why, it will not matter."

"It is a wise precaution," said Dick; "but I don't feel the least afraid, for I will have the bridge well watched before your messenger arrives."

"You may expect him, then," said Matthew, "by the second night from this. I shall be sure to know before that time."

"And," said Dick, "we must arrange another meeting after that, for I feel myself much indebted to you, and whatever obligation I am under I shall not rest until I have discharged."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Matthew—"never mind such nonsense as that. I do not render you all these services simply for the money I can make out of you, but merely because I like you, so let us hear no more about obligations, I beg."

"It is all very fine, Matthew, for you to speak like that, but I shall not allow—"

Dick paused, for just then he was startled by the ringing of a bell, which caused old Matthew to spring to his feet.

"Quick," he cried—"into the cupboard with you—make all speed! Perhaps it is only a false alarm; at any rate, you can shift for yourself. I will go downstairs. Take good care the officers do not enter this room until you have had plenty of time to conceal yourself."

He spoke these words very hurriedly, and as he pronounced the last, passed hurriedly out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Dick was very rapid in all his movements.

Not knowing how long he might have to remain in his uncomfortable place of concealment, he picked up the glass out of which he had been drinking, and carried it into the recess along with him.

To shut the cupboard doors, and afterwards to pull down the back part of the cupboard, occupied but a very few moments indeed.

Yet he was only just in time.

Immediately afterwards he heard, though indistinctly, the sound of footsteps and the loud murmur of voices.

Of what was said he could not form any idea; but, from

the tone used, he guessed something like an altercation was going on.

Then the door leading into the room he had so recently quitted was dashed open, after which came a brief pause.

"I tell you you are playing falsely!" Dick heard a voice cry, in high, exasperated tones. "Do you mean to assure me positively that a few moments ago you were not seated in this room along with another person?"

Dick did not catch old Matthew's reply, for he spoke in a more subdued voice.

"Then I say you do not speak the truth," was the rejoinder. "I have just come from across the way, and as I stood at the barber's bed-room window I could see into this, and made out distinctly you and another person sitting at this table."

Neither knew it, but just as the officer spoke, both old Matthew and Dick were engaged on the very same operation, and that was in inwardly, but none the less bitterly, cursing the barber for his interference.

As before, Dick could not make out what old Matthew said in reply, but the officer—for such beyond a doubt he was—exclaimed:

"Now, my men, is the time to show your sharpness. Never mind a word of what he says—I know him for an inveterate liar. I saw two men sitting here not five minutes ago. There's no one to be found, so it's clear there's a hiding-place somewhere, and you've got to find it."

After those words were spoken, there was a vast amount of clattering caused by the hasty removal of the various articles of furniture contained in the room.

Dick, having heard so much, not unnaturally began to feel very uneasy for his own safety.

After what Matthew had said, he fully believed the officers would, with care and time, discover the recess at the back of the closet.

A cold perspiration broke out all over him, and as minute after minute elapsed, his uneasiness increased.

Most bitterly indeed did he regret having been persuaded to take up his quarters in such a place, for how inglorious it would appear for the officers to break down the panelling and seize him hiding in such a place!

These thoughts made Dick almost desperate.

For the first time, he began to wonder whether there was any outlet from this secret recess.

He had forgotten to ask Matthew anything on the subject.

But the more Dick thought, the more assured he felt that such a place as this would not be constructed without some means being contrived of emerging from it.

Just then the closet door opened, and one of the officers entered, and poked about very vigorously among the clothing with his sword.

Dick held his breath, for there was nothing to divide him from his foe but a thin partition of woodwork.

"Nobody here," was the reply, and then this man, who never for a moment thought of trying whether the back of the cupboard had a hollow sound or not, stepped out, and closed the door behind him.

"Escape number one," said Dick. "But that little incident only makes me feel the more that I shall not be so fortunate a second time."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, he rapidly produced from his pocket a phosphorous match, which he ignited silently.

The light lasted only for an instant, yet enabled him to glance at the walls around him.

He saw no means by which the recess could be left, but, believing that the means of leaving it would be similar to those by which he had entered, he stooped down, and endeavored to insert his fingers in between the floor and the walls.

At his first attempt he succeeded, and raised the piece of woodwork to the extent of about an inch.

Then he paused.

"I am all right now," he thought, though he had not the remotest idea of where he would find himself after passing through this partition.



[DICK TURPIN ENDEAVOURS TO ELUDE HIS FOES.]

It was at this moment that the closet doors were again thrown open, and Dick heard the man with the exasperated voice cry:

"Don't you think I can believe my own eyesight? I tell you I saw somebody here; and where's he gone? I'm sure there is a secret hiding-place somewhere! I have been told that this old inn is full of them, and I'll do my best to find out to-night!"

While he spoke, the officer began with the butt-end of his pistol to rap against the walls of the closet.

As he began at the side, close to the hinges of the door, where the wall was perfectly solid, the sound returned was of such a character as to make him certain there was no hiding-place there.

On reaching the back, however, the first blow produced a hollow, reverberating sound.

The officer uttered a shriek.

"I have it," he cried—"I have it—this is the place!"

No. 204.—BLACK BESS.

Never mind finding out the secret! Break down the woodwork—it will be done in a moment!"

With these words, he raised his pistol in the air and brought down the butt-end of it with full force upon the panelling.

A large crack was the result.

The next blow produced another.

The officers came crowding round him, and a few more heavy strokes demolished the woodwork to such an extent that the officers were able to seize hold of it, and by main force pull out a large piece.

The officer sprang forward with a cry of exultation, which quickly changed its tone to one of disappointment.

There was the recess, it is true, but it was perfectly empty, save and except the chair on which Dick had placed the glass out of which he had been so lately drinking.

Old Matthew had during these occurrences suffered such an amount of mental agitation as few could have any conception of, and he looked upon Dick's disappearance as something miraculous, for he was not aware himself that there was any means of leaving the recess.

He could scarcely believe his eyes, indeed; but his satisfaction was, nevertheless, most intense.

"There's nobody there," cried the officer, in deep disappointment—"nobody at all!"

"But there's this glass, sir," said one of the men.

"Oh, d—n the glass! Don't bother me with that!"

"But there's ale in it," continued the officer, speaking cautiously—"there's ale in it; and, look, why, there's froth on it, and it looks as fresh as though it had only been just drawn."

This occurrence arrested the officer's attention, and at the same moment filled old Matthew with despair.

"So it has," cried the one with the angry voice—"so it has! Ah! I knew I was right. He is close at hand, my lads, depend upon it! Look around, and you will see the means of leaving this recess."

Just as he spoke, there came a loud and thrilling shriek, evidently issuing from female lips.

At the sound the officers all stood aghast.

"Help—help!" they heard a voice cry, very distinctly.

"Help—help! Murder—thieves!"

"He's caught!" cried the chief officer—"as I'm a living man, he's caught! Down with that bit of wood-work! Dash against it! The sooner you break it down the better!"

The officers obeyed, but it took them rather longer to pull down the panelling than they had anticipated.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN PUTS IN EXECUTION A BOLD AND NOVEL EXPEDIENT.

In order to explain the meaning of this strange occurrence, we must go back to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

He waited until the officer struck against the wood-work with his pistol, then he knew discovery was certain.

Without another second's pause or hesitation, he stooped down, and slowly and noiselessly raised the large piece of wood forming the back of the recess.

He only did so to a sufficient distance to allow him to creep beneath it.

This he did with all secrecy imaginable.

Then he drew it down again.

He was only just in time—indeed, he had scarcely composed himself before the panelling was torn down, and the recess discovered.

He remained perfectly still after this, listening to what took place next.

Where he was he had not the remotest idea, except that it was possible he was in another closet similar to the one he had recently left.

How much he regretted having left the glass behind him, as that unquestionably helped the officers to get on the right track.

When he heard the remarks passed upon it, he was sure that his present place was no abiding spot, and he began to seek some means of quitting it.

Feeling cautiously with his hands, his fingers encountered two doors similar to those opening into old Matthew's room.

They yielded to his touch, and he pushed them open slowly and gently.

Then, creeping out with a stealthiness that would have delighted an Indian, he raised himself to his feet, and endeavored to take a peep at his surroundings.

He was in a room evidently, for he could see the window, through which there came a very dim amount of twilight.

He moved forward, as he believed, in the direction of the door, but he was not looking sufficiently close to his feet, for, with great suddenness, he struck against the post of a bedstead.

It was then that the shrill scream that had so startled the officers broke forth, and it must be confessed that it did not do Dick quite as much.

Recovering his presence of mind, however, he exclaimed:

"Do not be alarmed—all is well!"

But his words were perfectly unheeded.

The female by whom the room was tenanted had evidently got hold of the idea that a man was in the room, whose intention was to rob and murder her, and so she kept up the prodigious clamor.

Finding all efforts to silence her vain, Dick, who by this time had discovered the doorway, lost no time in passing through it.

As his hand passed over the lock he felt a key.

He took it out instantly, thrust it in on the other side, and locked the chamber door.

This he knew would cause delay, and, in the meantime, what he had to do was to seek the street.

Accordingly, he descended the stairs at full speed, but, ere he had gone far, some one, alarmed no doubt by the fearful shriek, cried out:

"In Heaven's name, what's the matter? Oh, lawks! who are you?"

"The devil!" said Dick, in a sepulchral voice.

There was a smothered kind of cry, and then the door was hastily shut.

But Dick was very far from being anything like safe.

The house would be so thoroughly alarmed before he could get to the bottom of it, that on attempting to leave it he would most likely run into the arms of the officers.

The first-floor landing was now, however, reached, but just as his foot touched it, a door was opened, and a man with an extraordinary worsted night-cap on his head, a candle in his left hand, and a dark object in his right, appeared.

He seemed to catch sight of Dick, for he cried:

"Take that, you wretch, and don't you disturb me any more! I tell you I won't be bothered with you!"

These words plainly showed that he mistook Dick for somebody else.

When he said "Take that!" he lifted up his right hand in which he held the dark object, which proved to be a missile of some kind, for it flew past Dick's head with unpleasant swiftness.

Its course was stopped by the face of a large clock which stood upon the landing.

There was a crash, and then the mechanism became so deranged that the clock began to strike at a furious rate.

So alarmed was the night-capped gentleman by the effects of his violence that he dropped his candle and precipitately retreated into his room.

Dick made a plunge down the staircase, inwardly cursing his ill-luck.

When about half-way to the ground floor, however, he perceived a small window, which had been contrived for the purpose of lighting the staircase.

Happening to glance through it, he saw that it opened upon some leads, and this caused him to pause.

The way of escape he now believed lay clear enough before him.

To open the window took him scarcely more than a second.

He passed through it, closed it after him, and then found himself standing on what was to all appearances the top of a cistern.

On one side of him was a rather narrow wall, which extended for a considerable distance.

Without hesitation, he stepped upon it, and, without giving a thought to the narrow space on which he stood, ran rapidly along.

Reaching the extremity, he saw, only a few feet below him, the pavement of a narrow court.

He dropped without hesitation, and running forward, quickly found himself in one of the streets lying between Clare Market and Lincoln's Inn.

He set forward to run immediately, though he instantly became conscious of the impolicy of this course, and certainly had he not been so greatly excited he would never have dreamed of adopting it.

His flying form arrested the attention of a man, who set up a tremendous shout.

"Stop him!" he cried—"stop him! A highwayman!—a highwayman! There he goes! Stop him—stop him!"

These cries were instantaneously followed by loud shouts and a trampling of footsteps, so that in what seemed a magical short space of time Dick found himself followed by a crowd of persons of all ages and both sexes.

His hopes of escape now sank down to zero, yet he did not on that account in the least degree abate his speed, if anything, he increased it.

Panting and breathless, with the perspiration running down his face in streams, and with a kind of mist before his eyes that half blinded him, he strove to think what would be the best thing he could do in order to baffle his pursuers.

He turned a corner rapidly, and then another; but they were so close upon his track that before he was able to turn again they had him once more in sight.

At every step did the numbers of those who were pursuing him increase; and there was this disadvantage, so far as Dick was concerned, that whereas he was almost spent with running, those who were foremost in the chase had only just begun their task.

All at once, a man started out into the centre of the road and extended both his arms.

To attempt to dodge past him Dick knew would be absurd, and so kept on his course, determined to run the man down, though he feared that in the scuffle he might be delayed sufficiently to enable his foes to pounce upon him.

This, no doubt, was what the man calculated upon, but he forgot to take into consideration his own personal condition.

Clenching his right hand, Dick ran on straight as an arrow.

The man stood resolutely up, but the tremendous blow from Dick's fist felled him like an ox.

The highwayman staggered for an instant, then bounded on.

Actually he had gained a little on his foes, and, perceiving another turning which led towards Lincoln's Inn, he did not hesitate to take it.

But no sooner had he turned the corner than he was struck with a sudden thought.

He was then out of sight of all his foes, and could count upon being for the space of a few seconds, yet not long enough to enable him to reach the top of the street.

But he paused close to a doorway of rather pretentious character, on which was a brass plate.

He perceived this, as well as the name upon it, by means of a lamp that was burning above, and that was placed purposely so as to render the words on the door-plate legible.

With a boldness that was astounding, Dick stepped up to this door, and knocked at it, while at the same time he pulled the bell.

During the brief space that he had to wait for a reply, he read upon the plate the words:—

"Mr. Solomon Cartwright, solicitor."

Just as the door was opened, the crowd of persons turned the corner.

Dick was hidden by the projecting portico, and no sooner was the door opened than, without waiting to be invited to enter, he stepped in and closed it after him.

Then he had the satisfaction of hearing his pursuers rush by.

"What is it, please?" said a female voice with tolerable clearness.

"Is Mr. Cartwright within?"

"Yes, sir, he is; but this is past business hours, and he cannot be disturbed."

"I am sorry for that," said Dick, who scarcely knew what to say.

But his active brain quickly suggested something, and he added:

"Be good enough to tell him that a gentleman wishes to see him on some matters connected with the sale of some property."

Now Dick hoped that the girl would leave him and go to deliver this message, in which case he would have slipped out of the door, and trusted to his good luck to make an escape.

To his deep annoyance, however, he was frustrated in this intention, for a door close at hand was opened, and a gentleman stepped out into the passage.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked—"who is it?"

"A gentleman wants particularly to see you about some property," was the reply.

"Oh, certainly!" said the lawyer, who was never one to allow the chance of obtaining a fresh client to pass by. "Ask the gentleman to walk this way."

Dick had no resource but to comply.

"I'm doomed to nothing but misfortune to-night," he thought. "What on earth can I do? How can I manage to deceive this man?—what shall I tell him?"

Really he had no time for thought.

The door was close at hand.

Without the lapse of a moment, he was shown into a room.

There was a fire burning in it, and a lighted lamp was standing on the table, and surrounded by a great quantity of papers.

"Take a seat, sir—pray take a seat!" said the lawyer as he turned up the lamp, so as to cause it to give a brighter light, and to enable him to see his visitor better. "I happen at the present moment to be quite disengaged."

Dick wished from the bottom of his heart that the solicitor was overwhelmed with business.

Nevertheless, he took a seat, and, with as much calmness as he could command, drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Dear me," ejaculated the lawyer, "how warm you look!"

"Yes," said Dick, concealing his breathlessness with much difficulty, "it is quite sultry."

"How odd!" said the lawyer, with a shiver. "Here have I been crouching over the fire all night."

"I am excited," said Dick—"very much excited, and I have come here at a very rapid rate to see you, as I was fearful I should be too late."

"I am perfectly ready to listen to you," was the lawyer's reply. "Be good enough to let me know the nature of your business."

This was a poser, for what to say next Dick had not the remotest idea, so, merely with the view of gaining time, he once more took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped his face with it.

While he did so, he could not help noticing that the lawyer was looking at him with an expression of suspicion and distrust.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN VERY CLEVERLY MAKES A TOOL OF THE LAWYER.

BUT Dick Turpin was fast becoming himself again—cool, calm and determined.

The silence that prevailed in the street justified him in indulging in the belief that his pursuers had lost the scent altogether, and that he would have nothing more to do than to speak for a short time to the solicitor and then quietly take his departure.

But even at this moment he heard a loud hubbub, which gradually yet rapidly increased in loudness.

"Dear me," said the lawyer, with an air of vexation, "what in the world can be the matter with the people to-night?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Dick. "There's something the matter; but I don't know that it need concern us."

"No, certainly not. Pray proceed to the business you were about to place before me."

The lawyer made a feint of consulting his watch, as if to show that his time was precious.

"Well," said Dick, "to be brief with you, Mr. Cartwright, the fact is that a dear and much-loved friend of mine is at the present moment in very deep distress."

"Pecuniary distress?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes—in fact, he is in debt, and has been 'brust into prison. It is a shocking thing, for I know very well that with anything like reasonable time he could pay off the whole of his debts."

"Then may I ask your object in consulting me?"

"I will tell you in a moment," said Dick, who by this time had arranged his whole plan of future operations, and which promised to be so satisfactory that he threw off at once all the fears and apprehensions under which he had been laboring.

"I am staying at the Regent's Hotel in Piccadilly, and the head waiter there was kind enough to mention your name to me as being a gentleman likely to do what I required."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer. "I am rather surprised at that, for at the moment I cannot recollect such an hotel as that in Piccadilly, nor can I say that I am acquainted with any head waiter either."

"Well, sir, such is the fact," said Dick, with unblushing effrontery. "I am quite a stranger in London, and when this dreadful affair happened to my friend I posted up to town at once. I always stop at the Regent's Hotel, and as the head waiter was the first person I saw I asked him what I had better do."

"But what do you want me to do?" said the lawyer, with a bland smile, for he began to think that so excitable a personage as Dick seemed to be would prove a very good client.

"I have some property in Berkshire," said Dick—"freehold, and of considerable value. I have brought the title deeds with me, and I want to know whether a mortgage can be executed upon it for about one half of its value, which will enable me to set my friend at liberty."

"Yes, certainly," said the lawyer. "I often manage matters of that kind—not that I have money myself, but many of my clients have, who are anxious to lend it out for a mortgage."

"That is just what the head waiter told me," said Dick, with great assurance.

"Would you be good enough," said the lawyer, "to let me look at the title deeds you spoke of?"

Dick placed his hand in the breast pocket of his coat, then exclaimed:

"Dear me, sir, would you believe it? In my great state of excitement I have left the papers in my portmanteau at the hotel? What is to be done?"

"Just what you please," said the lawyer, in an altered tone.

"Well, then," said Dick, "suppose you call a hackney-coach: we can then both go to the hotel together, and drink a glass of wine: you can look over the title deeds, and the matter put in a fair way for settlement."

"Oh, certainly," said the lawyer; "I have no objection to that at all; we will go at once, if you are willing."

"Yes, I am quite willing," said Dick—how willing, the lawyer little thought.

They stepped out into the passage, on a peg against the wall of which some cloaks and hats were hanging.

The lawyer selected one of each of these articles.

"My dear sir," said Dick, "would you mind doing me the favor of lending me one of your cloaks? Now that I have got over my excitement I feel the cold strike with quite a chill."

"Oh, certainly," said the lawyer, "with very great pleasure! Take this one. In your present condition you are likely enough to take a cold that will result in your death."

Dick took the proffered cloak gladly, not that he cared about his heated condition, but he knew very well that wrapping this garment around him would greatly change his outward appearance.

"Mary," said the gentleman, "just call a hackney-coach."

The girl opened the door and stood outside, and just as she did so, the very vehicle they wanted came rolling by.

It was stopped at once, and then, with a heart which it must be confessed beat faster than usual, Dick followed the lawyer across the threshold into the street.

Here many people were assembled staring in all directions.

It was pretty clear that they had formed a tolerably good guess as to the exact spot where the highwayman had disappeared.

"What's the matter?" asked the lawyer of some one standing near.

"They're after Dick Turpin, the highwayman, sir," was the answer. "He was chased to somewhere hereabout and disappeared."

"Oh, indeed," said the lawyer, "then I hope he will be caught, for nothing would please me better than to hear the last of him. I have been twice robbed by his rascally associates."

While these few words were passing, Dick had entered the hackney-coach, the door of which was held open by the driver.

Mr. Cartwright followed, and as the door was closed Dick said:

"Drive to the bottom of Piccadilly; I will call to you when to pull up."

Mr. Cartwright was about to make a remark, but just then the coach was set in motion, and such a jolting and such a horrible rattling noise ensued that he gave up in despair the attempt to make himself heard.

At last Dick felt that he had reached the end of his troubles, and therefore he leaned back in the coach with a contented air.

To be sure there was the little difficulty to be got over, that it was necessary to dispose of the lawyer somehow.

But Turpin considered this such a trifle that he hardly bestowed a thought upon it.

Over and over again he congratulated himself upon his good fortune in having so availed himself of the strange turn that events took.

His object in deluding the lawyer with the story about the mortgage of the estate was simply to find a means of reaching the bottom of Piccadilly, which it will be remembered was the place where he had left his mare Black Bess.

Certainly the ingenuity of the plan deserves commendation as well as the successful manner in which it was carried out.

The distance to Piccadilly was not very great, and the two horses which were harnessed to the hackney-coach quickly brought them there.

"Now, my dear sir," said the lawyer, confidentially, "here we are in Piccadilly. Be good enough to point out the hotel."

"It is a little lower down," said Dick, looking carefully through the windows, for he was in search of the narrow turning in which stood the stable where he had left his mare.

But while doing so, he became conscious of the fact that it would be impolitic in the extreme to quit this lawyer hastily, or in such a manner as to give an immediate alarm.

To spoil so good a piece of work by a little bungling at the end was what Dick was very disinclined to do.

Therefore, he again set his brain to work, and this time with as much success as before.

"There it is," he exclaimed, pointing to a well-lighted building which actually stood at the very corner of the thoroughfare he so much wished to reach—"there it is."

"Why, that's not the Regent's Hotel!" ejaculated the lawyer. "That's the Royal."

"Of course it is!" said Dick. "What an absurd mistake for me to make! Did I really say Regent's?"

"You did indeed, and repeated it many times."

"Then you must attribute that mistake to my state of excitement. However, I am calmer now—much calmer."

The lawyer smiled, and then said:

"Still I am puzzled about this head waiter. I most certainly don't know him, for I never was across the threshold of this building in my life."

"You will see directly," said Dick, "for here we are."

He called out to the driver, who at once stopped opposite to the entrance of the hotel.

Dick alighted and gave him so liberal a fare that the coachman actually said: "Thank you, sir!" a piece of civility he had never been known to vouchsafe to anybody before.

The lawyer knew that he had given this man about six times his proper fare, and smiled again, for he thought a man who was so liberal to a hackney-coach driver would be equally so with himself, and so on this very ground was not disposed to say a word about his extravagance.

Scarcely anyone would have had the audacity to walk up the spacious stone steps leading to the fashionable hotel as Turpin did, but he had already found that wherever he had dared the most there he had succeeded the best.

On reaching the top of the steps, the massive plate glass door was opened by an obsequious attendant.

"Coffee-room," said Dick, laconically.

The man bowed and pointed to a door a little way off on which the words were written.

Dick nodded his head in return, and stepped briskly forward.

Reaching the coffee-room door, Turpin pushed it open and stood aside to allow the lawyer to follow him.

It was rather an odd thing, but just at that time the coffee-room happened to be empty.

"I have only a bed-room here," said Dick to Mr. Cartwright, as that gentleman took a seat near the fire, "and of course my portmanteau is there. It will not take me a moment to run upstairs and fetch you the title deeds, so you will excuse me for leaving you here a moment while I do so."

This was said with so offhand an air, and sounded so plausible and reasonable that the lawyer immediately gave his consent.

This was all Dick needed, and his exultation at having managed as well could scarcely be restrained within bounds.

Leaving the coffee-room again, he stepped swiftly along the hall to the door.

Dick hesitated for half a second, then put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a guinea.

He slipped the coin into the hand of the attendant, and as he did so he said, with a wink:

"A that gentleman who came in with me a moment ago should ask you where I have gone, just be good enough to say that you have not seen me."

Whether the man would comply with this demand Dick did not wait to know; but the way in which he slipped the guinea into his pocket was very suggestive.

"Free!" said Dick, after he had descended the steps of the hotel—"once more free, after running the gauntlet of so many dangers—free, too, by my own unaided exertions! Truly has my brain been busy to-night, yet all is well; a few minutes more and I shall be in possession of Black Bess; and when I feel that gallant mare beneath me I shall bid defiance to all that my enemies can accomplish!"

Just as he spoke these words, Dick reached the doorway leading to the stables.

He glanced up and down the street, but all was perfectly silent.

Seizing the bell-handle, he pulled it somewhat vigorously, then waited with a singular mixture of calmness and anxiety for the ostler to make his appearance.

CHAPTER CMLXXXV.

FOR TURPIN IS REMINDED THAT HE IS AS YET BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

THE feeling rapidly intensified, and as it did so his anxiety increased.

It reached its culminating point at the moment when he heard a shuffling footstep in the inn yard, and caught sight of a dim gleam of light.

"I have been too precipitate," he muttered—"by far too precipitate! My late successes have blinded me to caution. I should have sent some one here in case of danger, or, at any rate, I ought to have reconnoitred first."

Having come to this conclusion, Dick glanced round him as well as the obscurity that filled the narrow turning would permit.

On the opposite side of the way, and nearly opposite to the stable gates, was a small doorway, that apparently formed a kind of private means of communication with the back part of the hotel.

Dick had resolved to secrete himself in a place where he could watch the course of events, and, as no better one than this presented itself, he darted across the roadway in a moment.

He had scarcely passed into the dark shadow caused by the depression in the wall, when he heard the fastenings of the stable gates noisily undone.

"I'm coming, sir," said a voice—"I'm coming, sir! Just have patience for half a moment."

"What the deuce does he mean by talking like that?" thought Dick. "And how does he know who is outside, I wonder?"

Just then one half of the gates was thrown open, and

at precisely the same instant Dick discovered that the door close to which he was pressing in order to get more out of sight was unfastened.

No sooner did he make this discovery than he instantly availed himself of the opportunity which this afforded for a better concealment.

His movements were so rapid, and yet so silent, that by the time he had placed himself on the opposite side of the door—which he held a little ajar in order that he might observe all that took place—the ostler had only managed to get the gate fairly open.

He raised in the air the lantern he carried, and glanced around him in great surprise.

"The devil!" he ejaculated, when he found that beyond all doubt no one was outside. "Why, it's a mistake. Some one rang the bell, and ran off, drat 'em!"

"What's that you say?" growled another voice. "Isn't he there?"

"No, that he isn't."

The second speaker came forward—sufficiently so for the rays of the lantern to fall upon him and reveal his exterior appearance.

Dick, on seeing him, drew back slightly, and pushed the door a little closer.

It was a police officer—a runner from Bow Street.

"Back, Mr. Bishop," said the ostler—"back, sir, if you please. Pray keep out of sight! He may be on the watch for aught I know."

Thus admonished, the officer retreated, and the ostler, after taking another survey around him, retreated also, and closed the gates, saying something in a growling tone all the while.

In less than a moment afterwards all was as silent as before.

"Another narrow escape," thought Dick—"by far too narrow to be at all agreeable. But certainly I must be in luck's way to-night."

Dick might well think this, for, since his departure from the old castle, Fortune had constantly favored him.

But the highwayman, just at that moment, had more to think about in the present than the past.

A rapid glance at his position made him conscious that, to say the least of it, it was a very unpleasant one.

What he had witnessed convinced him beyond all doubt that by some one or other his mare had been recognised, and, in consequence, a watch set in the hope of securing him on his return.

How nearly they had succeeded the reader knows already—but for his lucky second thought, the highwayman could scarcely have got free.

A slight noise behind him caused by the opening and shutting of the door disturbed the highwayman in his thoughts, and reminded him that the place he was in was not at all adapted for an abiding spot.

He had no other resource than to enter the street again.

He did this most reluctantly.

But the narrow thoroughfare still wore its deserted appearance.

Dick glanced up at the high brick walls which defended the stable-yard.

"Black Bess is there," he said to himself—"there, and surrounded by my foes and hers. She cannot help herself. I would as soon part with my life as lose her, and so I shall have to depend upon my own exertions to set her free. It must be done somehow, and that without delay."

Dick Turpin paced slowly down the street in deep thought.

Certainly the task which he had set himself was one which any other man would have given up in despair as being totally impossible; but its very difficulty only served as a stimulus to Dick.

He was not long before he arranged his plan of action up to a certain point.

"Before I can go any further," he murmured, as he turned round and retraced his steps, "I must ascertain the exact force which my enemies muster. I must also find out how they are disposed, and just where abouts Black Bess is situated. Yes, certainly, that will be the preliminary step to take."

Glancing up to the walls, Dick fancied that he should

be able, by giving a good spring, to get the ends of his fingers over the edge.

He tried, and at the first trial succeeded.

His next act was to draw himself up by his arms to an extent as enabled him to take a peep at the other side.

Owing to the darkness, however, he was not able to make out anything with much distinctness, though he perceived rather a long range of low buildings, from a window in one part of which a light was shining.

Here, he conjectured, he should find Black Bess; but it was a conjecture merely, for, as the reader will recollect, he was quite ignorant of the nature of the premises. It was, perhaps, about the only occasion on which he had omitted to follow Black Bess to her stable in order to be familiar with its whereabouts, and now he bitterly regretted his indiscretion.

But regrets were useless, and dismissing them from his mind, he began to draw himself up higher and higher still above the wall, being emboldened to do so by the perfect quiet which prevailed.

At length, by dint of a little scrambling, Dick managed to get fairly astride the wall; then, crouching down as closely as he could, he crawled in the direction of the light.

Evidently there was no one outside on the watch; but this was not surprising, for the night air was too cold to make anyone wish for the job, and, moreover, they doubtless considered that they should receive timely intimation of the highwayman's approach.

Dick found that he was on the wrong part of the wall to get anywhere near the lighted window; but he crept as close as he could, and then waited.

It would almost seem as though the slight noise he had made in his progress had been heard, for a door was opened, and the ostler appeared.

Dick sank down from observation.

"It is nothing," said the ostler, evidently addressing some one within—"nothing at all. Everything is quite quiet."

"Then come in, will you, and shut the door, for it is confoundingly cold."

The ostler obeyed with alacrity.

Owing to his elevated and awkward position, Dick was not able to do more than just get a glimpse through the doorway, yet that was sufficient to show him that the interior was fitted up as a stable.

Most probably Black Bess was there, and the officers were watching near her.

What else to do, Dick at the moment knew not.

How to regain possession of Black Bess certainly seemed a greater mystery than ever.

Dick felt it so, and chafed impatiently.

"It would be something," he thought, at last, "if I could only find out how many I have to grapple with. If no more than the ostler and the officer I saw, I will risk an encounter with them."

Dick felt much relieved at having thus arrived at a decision, and he was not long before he devised the means by which he could make this important discovery without running any great risk himself.

Looking back a little way, he saw that the large bell he had rung was fixed to the wall just inside the gate, and was, he believed, in such a position that he could reach it without much trouble.

A peal upon it, he thought, would not fail to draw them forth again.

At any rate, there could be no harm in putting such a stratagem into execution.

Dick seized hold of a piece of the wire and pulled it with all his might.

The clanging was truly terrific, and he kept it up for some time, so as to induce a belief that whoever was outside was anxious and impatient to get in.

"That's him!" cried a voice, as the stable door was flung open—"that's him for certain! Come on! Get all ready; but don't show yourselves till I give you the word!"

"Hush—hush!"

The ostler hurried to the gate, and as he had not replaced all the fastenings, he flung it open in much less time than he had taken before.

And now most decidedly did the fickle goddess Fortune favor the perplexed highwayman.

It so happened that just as the ostler flung open the gate a chance pedestrian wrapped in a cloak was passing by.

The ostler no sooner caught sight of him than he uttered a cry.

At the same time he sprang forward, seizing the stranger by the throat.

The cry was followed by the rush of footsteps, and then, from out of the stable there issued no less than seven police officers.

Had any one of them chanced to cast his eyes up to the top of the wall, it is quite possible that Dick would have been detected there.

But of this there was no fear.

All their faculties were engrossed by the struggle which was taking place in the street, for the stranger, believing himself attacked by robbers, resented with right good will the attack which the ostler made upon him.

The officers hastened to his assistance, and so convinced were they that the right man had been seized that they never troubled themselves to take a second glance, but with the greatest impetuosity joined in the fray.

It was almost a moment before Dick could properly comprehend what had occurred; but as soon as ever the actual truth flashed upon his mind, he said to himself, with great determination:

"Now or never is the time! Such a chance as this is more than I could possibly have expected, and certainly such a one as will not occur again!"

With these words in his mind, if not on his lips, Dick turned, lowered himself rapidly from the top of the wall, and dropped into the stable-yard.

He happened to alight upon some littered straw, so that no alarm was given.

The conflict was going on outside, if possible, with redoubled violence.

Like a shadow, Dick flitted rapidly across the yard and darted into the stable.

Here a light was burning.

A cry of exultation escaped his lips.

There, safe, and to all appearances unhurt, was his bonny mare, Black Bess.

In an instant she recognised her master, and gave utterance to a sharp neigh.

Dick caressed her while he untied her from the manger.

Her trappings had all been removed, and, though he made a rapid search, he failed to find them.

He uttered an impatient ejaculation; but to linger would spoil all—probably bring on his own death or capture.

"It must be thus," he said, addressing Black Bess. "I have ridden you bare-backed before, and can do so again. The halter shall serve me for a bridle."

So saying, Dick led Black Bess to the stable door.

He sprang then into the saddle, for a kind of lull had taken place outside.

The officers had just discovered that they had made a most ridiculous mistake.

The man they had seized, and whom they had at last succeeded in overpowering, they found, upon examination, to bear no resemblance to Dick Turpin whatever.

The clatter of hoofs upon the stones in the yard caused them to turn round.

What words can express their astonishment, rage, and fury, when they saw before them Dick Turpin sitting composedly on the back of bonny Black Bess!

CHAPTER CMLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES, AND PROVIDES HIMSELF WITH A FRESH SADDLE AND BRIDLE.

"CLEAR the way, there!" cried Dick Turpin, in a loud, ringing voice, for the officers had all fallen into immovable attitudes indicative of their feelings—"clear the way there! Let me pass!"

This speech at once brought the officers to their senses.

Releasing their hold upon the bewildered stranger, they dashed headlong, pell-mell into the yard.

But Dick was prepared for them.

"On, Bess!" he cried, exultantly. "Forward, old lass! On—on! Down with them!"

Never before did Black Bess respond so gallantly or so promptly to her rider's commands.

She gave one tremendous bound forward—a bound which scarcely anything human could withstand.

The officers scattered before it like so much chaff, and, without experiencing a shock, Dick Turpin found himself on the other side of the stable gates.

The ostler was furious at this utter failure of his deep-laid plan.

"Down with him!" he yelled. "Shoot him—shoot him! Where are your pistols? Shoot him, I say! Shoot his mare—that will be better! Curse the brute! I can feel her teeth now! Lend me a pistol, somebody, and I'll shoot her!"

These vindictive words produced a total change in Dick's feelings, for they aroused all his strongest passions.

Any injury meditated towards himself he thought nothing of—he considered that the officers had a fair right to shoot at him if they wished.

But with Black Bess it was another thing altogether.

Things which, had they regarded himself alone, he would have taken no notice of whatever, assumed quite a different aspect when Black Bess was concerned.

Therefore, when these words were uttered, he turned round with flashing eyes.

In his hasty rage, he drew a pistol from his belt.

Without reflection, and acting only upon the impulse of resentment, he levelled it at the cowardly ostler, and fired.

In the confined space in which he stood, the report seemed tremendous.

The ostler uttered a shriek, and, throwing his arms up above his head, fell back.

Turning round again with equal suddenness, Dick hurled his pistol at his foes, and set Black Bess in motion.

His breast was still filled with angry feelings as he dashed down Piccadilly in the direction of the open country, though he experienced a savage satisfaction in the thought that the ostler had not escaped without receiving some punishment for his meditated atrocity.

"So he felt your teeth, did he, Bess?" he muttered. "I am glad of it, and I hope he will feel the pain till his last day! What was it, lass, that made you turn round upon him like that?" he added, aloud.

By the way he spoke, one would have thought that he really expected to receive some comprehensible reply from his mare, and certainly the odd, neighing noise which she made immediately afterwards seemed like an effort at articulation.

Dick's thoughts were now distracted by hearing unmistakable sounds of pursuit coming from the rear.

"No matter!" he said, as he turned round, and looked behind him with a disdainful smile. "Let them come on—I can outrun them easily!"

About this there could be little doubt, provided he had a clear course before him, for never had Black Bess appeared to be in better condition for the road.

Certainly, while Dick had gone through so many hair-breadth escapes she had been resting quietly in the stable.

The night was dark and inclined to be stormy, and, as far as Dick was able to see, there was no one on the road before them.

Accordingly, he allowed the rope attached to the halter to fall loosely upon the neck of his steed.

A gallop of a few miles placed him beyond all fear or danger of pursuit, and, such being the case, he gradually reduced his mare's pace, as he never unnecessarily distressed her by a hard gallop.

He also found that it was far from comfortable to ride so far without those useful appendages, a saddle and a bridle.

"I must make good this loss," he cried, half aloud. "But that can be done easily. I make no doubt—but the sooner the better, for all that."

Dick had not even now recovered his usual equanimity, and there was something angry and altogether unlike his usual manner in the way in which he looked before him in the hope of catching sight of some solitary traveller.

But no one appeared in sight.

A long stretch of rising ground was before him, and at this he allowed Black Bess to proceed at a walking pace.

When the ascent was almost accomplished, a horseman suddenly came into view on the brow of the hill.

"There is the man," was Dick's remark. "He has got what I want, and he had better surrender it to me quietly, for I am in no humor to be crossed."

The new-comer's horse seemed somewhat exhausted after making the ascent on the opposite side, and so it was allowed to pause a little while to recover its wind.

Dick rode forward at the same steady rate.

The sharp ring of a horse's footsteps caused the horseman to look before him and endeavor to pierce the darkness.

He was not long in making out the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

Dick kept unwaveringly on his way until breast to breast with the stranger.

Then he stopped with great abruptness.

"Good evening, sir!" he said.

The salutation was so courteous a one that the stranger could not refrain from returning it.

But evidently he either had his suspicions of Dick, or else he avoided making acquaintances on the high-road at night on principle, for he gave his horse a sharp slash with the whip, intending to set it in rapid motion.

But this intention was prevented from being carried out by Dick, who, with much promptitude, stretched out his hand and grasped the rein.

The horse swerved and pranced, almost unseating his rider, but Dick maintained his hold.

"Not so fast, sir," he cried—"not so fast! We have a little business to settle together before we part."

"You mistake! I have no business with you. Let me pass! I will not suffer to be molested thus!"

"You cannot help yourself," said Dick, gently but firmly, "and if you possess half the amount of good sense I give you credit for having, you will listen in patience."

"Well, sir?"

"It is not very well—in fact, very ill! I am in a little difficulty, and you must help me out of it!"

"That's cool, I must say!"

"Very!" responded Dick, imperturbably.

"Come, sir," said the stranger, impatiently, "I don't feel inclined to be trifled with—"

"Nor I either, sir!"

"What do you want?"

"That is a sensible question, and I will answer it with out delay. Doubtless you perceive, sir, that I am unprovided with a saddle and a bridle."

"I do perceive it. But what has that to do with me?"

"Much, or else I am greatly mistaken."

"How so?"

"Why, sir, I must trouble you to favor me with yours, they will just suit me."

"My saddle and bridle?"

"Exactly!"

"And you would have the unblushing impudence to sit there and ask me quietly to surrender my property in that fashion?"

"Exactly!"

"Then damme, sir!" cried the stranger, furious with rage, "let me tell you that you have got the wrong man to deal with! I won't stand anything of the kind! Keep off!"

"My dear sir—"

"Oh, d—n—"

"For you see this? It is a pistol. One of excellent make, I assure you! Hark! Did you hear that click? It is now on full cock! The muzzle is within eighteen inches of your breast. Now, be good enough to tell me whether you prefer to part with your saddle and bridle or your life, for I am determined to have one or the other, or both?"

There could be no possibility of mistaking Dick's words.

They were terribly in earnest.

They produced a palpable effect upon the stranger, for he shrunk back from before the muzzle of the pistol, and when he spoke again there was a marked difference in his tones.

"Put that pistol up, I beg! It might go off at any moment—accidentally, you know. Put it up!"

"Anything to oblige," said Dick, quietly. "And now, sir, since I have granted your request, grant mine."

"What is it?"

"Let me recommend you to dismount without making any more fuss, and, with what speed you are capable of making, divest your horse of his trappings."

"But if I give you my saddle and bridle, what the devil am I to do?"

"Get another."

"Why don't you?"

"I am about to."

"Curse it, but you know what I mean. My horse has got a backbone that sticks up, and it's as sharp as a nail to sit on, I assure you."

Dick could not forbear a smile.

"All that produces no effect upon me whatever, sir. But come; words enough and to spare have been wasted already. Dismount and off with the saddle at once!"

The stranger appeared to hesitate.

Dick carried his hand to his pocket in which he had carelessly deposited the pistol.

The gesture was sufficient.

With an execration which, if not loud, was deep, the stranger slid off his horse.

"I don't mind confessing to you," said Dick, "because I suppose you suspect it, but I am a highwayman. I have had a close brush with the officers, and you can supply the loss of a saddle and bridle with infinitely less trouble and risk than I can. So make no demur—I cannot tell how soon my enemies may make their appearance. Be quick!"

Upon hearing this, the traveller looked anxiously down the hill.

While he did so he fervently wished that he might be so fortunate as to catch sight of a troop of police officers approaching.

CHAPTE L CMLXXXVII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS A VERY ODD ADVENTURE WITH A VERY ECCENTRIC PERSONAGE.

"CURSE IT!" said the traveller, under his voice. "Whoever knew of officers to be at hand when they were particularly wanted?"

"What are you muttering about?" asked Dick, who had noticed the rapid glance, and partly caught the half-uttered words.

"Nothing, sir—nothing! Here, take the saddle, and be content. Surely you would not deprive me of the bridle?"

"I must—I cannot do without it. But you shall have this halter in exchange."

The stranger ground his teeth, but another glance assured him that no help was near, and so he surrendered the bridle.

Dick had Black Bess caparisoned with these fresh trappings in a moment, then lost no time in vaulting into the saddle.

"Now, look you, sir," he said, "there is little occasion to make so much fuss. The loss you have sustained is such a one that you can easily repair. You ought, indeed, to think yourself most lucky."

"Lucky?" repeated the traveller, sardonically.

"Yes, lucky in getting off so easily; and I should advise you to part company with me now, or I may take a fancy to whatever money or valuables you may be carrying about with you."

Hearing this, the traveller gave a great start, and hastily mounted his horse.

Either this idea had not occurred to him before, or else he carried about his person some objects he was by no means willing to part with.

"Good night, sir!" said Dick, with a politeness that made the other furious. "A pleasant journey to you!"

What the traveller said in reply was inarticulate, but he struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks, and set off down the hill at a pace that must have caused him great inconvenience if his horse's backbone was anything like so sharp as he had declared it to be.

Dick Turpin laughed heartily at the adventure, and indeed, he was so amused by it that those angry feelings which had heretofore filled his breast were vanished.

"Now, Bess," he exclaimed, "let us have another gallop, and that will go far towards taking us to our journey's end, when, I doubt not, we shall find many

anxiously looking for our arrival. Forward—forward, old girl! It seems to me that we have the road all to ourselves to-night!"

Slackening the reins while he spoke, Black Bess broke out into one of those long, stretching gallops which get over the ground with so much rapidity, and which she seemed to perform with so little fatigue to herself.

Ere he had gone far, however, Dick began gradually to draw her in again, for his quick ears had detected the approach of another horseman on the road.

It was more upon impulse than reflection that he reduced his mare's rate of speed, but having done so, he paused and began to think.

The sound made by the new-comer's horse's hoofs became now much more audible.

"What shall I do?" Dick asked himself. "This little adventure seems purposely thrown in my way. Shall I neglect it? It goes against the grain to do so; and besides, in the carrying out of the little enterprise I have on hand a good supply of money will be absolutely necessary."

He had no further space for deliberation, for just then the traveller's horse came into sight round the bend in the road.

An ejaculation escaped Dick's lips.

He reined Black Bess in with great suddenness.

Then he flung himself from the saddle with an amount of precipitancy that looked dangerous in the extreme.

The cause of these actions is easily described.

The horse which came round the bend of the road at so violent a pace was riderless.

Or rather, at a first glance he appeared to be so.

The highwayman's keen eyes, however, discerned that this horse was dragging at his heels some large, dark object.

What was it?

Dick recognised it with a shudder, and that was why he dismounted so precipitately.

It was the body of a man—

Evidently that of its rider, who by some means or other had fallen to the ground, and in doing so one foot had remained entangled in the stirrup.

The manner in which he was dragged over the rough, hard road was truly terrible to behold.

There was a groan and a faint cry for help.

But Dick was ready.

He was standing cool, calm, and determined in the middle of the road, and when the horse came thundering up he sprang forward and seized it by the reins.

But he almost lost his footing in his attempt to curb the speed of the terrified animal.

Clinging tightly, however, he ran forward a few yards, and then brought it quietly and gradually to a standstill.

The animal exhibited every sign of intense fear.

Its mane seemed standing half erect, its eyeballs were expanded and glaring wildly, while its flanks were covered over with white foam.

Few understood better how to treat a horse than Dick Turpin, and it looked magical to see how quickly he succeeded in taming and calming this frightened creature.

This much being done, and keeping tight hold of the rein in order to be guarded from any other accident, Dick turned his attention to the stranger, whose condition seemed to be desperate indeed.

He lay now without exhibiting the least sign of animation.

Not without some trouble, Dick succeeded in releasing his foot from the stirrup-iron; but having done so, he led the horse to the side of the road, and well secured it to the low-lying branch of a tree.

Here he knew it would be safe, and require no further attention, thus leaving him free to devote all his time to the injured stranger.

"Can you speak, sir?" asked Dick, as he bent over him. "If you can, tell me what I can do in order to assist you?"

A very faint groan was the only reply Dick got to his speech; but yet it contented him, for his object in inquiring was merely to ascertain whether the traveller was alive or not.

Finding that his injuries had not yet caused death, Dick hastened to the side of the road where he had noticed a little brook was flowing.



CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK COMPEL THE BALIFFS TO DISGORGE THEIR GOLD.

He had nothing else to carry water in save his hat; but he did not hesitate to put it to this use.

Returning quickly, he sprinkled some of it upon the stranger's face, who groaned again, and this time more audibly than before.

"Help—help," he gasped—"help! Save me, and what reward you ask for shall be yours! Help—oh, help!"

"I will help you gladly," said Dick. "Do you not already feel much better?"

"Thanks to you, I do. I feel that I am coming back to life! Oh, my bitterest curses be upon them; but they shall rue this deed—ay, they shall rue it!"

While speaking, the stranger evidently in no ordinary degree recovered possession of his senses, for he raised himself partially upon one arm, though the effort seemed to cause him infinite pain.

Dick now, for the first time, had an opportunity of noting his personal appearance.

As to his apparel, it was not easy to form any clear idea of its quality, for it was thickly besmeared with mud, though by its make Dick could tell that he belonged to the higher ranks of society.

"Water," he said, faintly—"give me water!"

Dick obeyed, and the stranger, as well as he was able, removed from his face the blood and dirt with which it was thickly covered, wiping himself upon a handkerchief which he took from an inner pocket.

When this operation was completed, Dick caught sight of a young, round, but very florid face, in which a pair of small eyes were set, giving him a sleepy appearance.

"You have had a narrow escape of your life, sir," said Dick. "I am glad to find your injuries are no worse than they are."

"Curse it, I'm bad enough! But come, help me on my horse—I can't stop here; and just name your reward, and you shall have it."

Dick, as may be supposed, did not relish being spoken to in this fashion.

"I want no reward," he answered. "Money would not purchase my services in such a case. I would have done as much for anyone."

"Is it possible," asked the stranger, "that you do not recognise me

Dick looked at him closely.

Then shook his head

"I have no recollection of ever having seen you," he said, after a brief pause.

The stranger gave a peculiar smile.

"And you refuse payment?"

"I do."

"Then you are an extraordinary person, that is all I can say, and I wish I could have a few about my person like you. However, I am determined to reward you in some way!"

"I want nothing, will receive nothing. Good-night! You are welcome!"

Dick, as he spoke moved to the side of Black Bess, and with his usual quick bound seated himself in the saddle.

"Stay," said the stranger, with greater imperiousness than had as yet been perceptible in his tones—"stay, I command you!"

"I obey nothing but my own inclinations. Once more, good-night!"

"But stay," cried the stranger, again, who seemed to be much interested and surprised by Dick's manner—"stay! At least you will let me know to whom I am indebted for this great service. What is your name?"

"It shall never be said that I refused to own it!"

"Well?"

"Dick Turpin."

"The highwayman?"

"At your service."

"But you stand in peril of your life."

"I am aware of it," was the smiling reply.

"A large reward is offered for your apprehension."

"True again."

"Then how is it that you are not captured?"

"Because a better man than myself has never opposed himself to me. And now, having answered all your questions, perhaps you will not object to reply to mine?"

"Sir," said the stranger, "you forget to whom you are speaking!"

"I do not, for I have not the pleasure of knowing."

"Look you, then," said the stranger. "I cannot bring myself to part with you thus—I will not show myself ungrateful. Take this ring, and if you will bring it some night to St. James's Palace you will hear of something that will turn out greatly to your advantage."

"St. James's Palace?" echoed Dick, for this mention of the abode of royalty not unreasonably filled him with surprise.

"Just so, and whether you like to take the ring or not I leave you to choose. If you don't care to pick it up, it can stay there for the benefit of the next person who passes this way."

With these words, the stranger urged his horse forward, and before the highwayman thoroughly recovered from the state of surprise into which these strange occurrences had thrown him, he was out of sight.

"Well," he ejaculated, at length, "this is an odd adventure, at any rate. What an eccentric person! Who on earth can he be? However, I will pick up the ring, and keep it as a memento of the affair. Some day or other I may feel disposed to find out what it all means, and learn what I am to hear to my advantage."

Having arrived at this determination, Dick once more dismounted and picked up the ring.

"A rare gem!" he exclaimed, as he held it up. "How it glitters and sparkles in this darkness! It must be of great value. Whoever can he be?"

It was in vain that Dick asked himself this question. He might give many guesses, all of which, possibly, might be far removed from the truth.

"I must take time to consider of it," he said, mentally. "Well, old lass," he added, aloud, addressing himself to his mare, "I think we have had enough of adventures for one night; besides, I ought to remember how much uneasiness my long absence will occasion. I will dally no

longer. Forward, Bess! We will take the nearest road to our destination."

Black Bess really seemed to understand that she was about to return to comfortable quarters, for she set forward with great willingness.

The highwayman's thoughts were busy as he rode swiftly along through the darkness; but, true to his determination, he did not draw rein until he perceived before him the dark-looking mass of trees which formed a background to the ruins of the old castle.

Greater cautiousness was now required in his progress; but as he rode slowly towards the spot where he had last left his companions he little thought of the strange and startling events which had taken place since his departure.

But in order that the reader shall be no longer kept in the dark concerning them, we will revert to the proceedings of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, both of whom it will be remembered had resolved to set out upon a pecuniary expedition.

CHAPTER CMLXXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL DO A GOOD ACTION, AND RECEIVE A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD IN RETURN.

"It's a darkish night, Jack," said Claude Duval to his companion, as soon as they gained the first cross-road; "but it is all the better for us on that account, I fancy."

"Most decidedly," was the reply. "And, to tell the truth, I never felt in better tune for a rare adventure in my life!"

"Nor I, and it is very odd to me if we do not meet with what we want. But come—push forward; we are, as yet, much too near the castle to think of attacking anybody."

With these words, the highwaymen at once increased the pace at which their horses had lately been going, and for some time a perfect silence reigned between them.

It was not broken until both, as if animated by the same impulse, pulled up.

"There is some one on the road before us, Claude."

"Yes, I hear them."

"Your pistols are ready, of course?"

"Yes."

"So are mine."

"Then fall back. The new-comers are certainly approaching us, and we shall be able to make up our minds as to whether we shall attack them, or allow them to pass by scot free."

Without further consideration, the two friends backed their horses close to the side of the road, which happened to be thrown into deep shadow.

As soon as they had taken up their positions here the approach of horsemen was more unmistakable than before.

Claude was listening intently, and then he said, in a low voice:

"There are three travellers on the road."

"Yes, there can be no mistake about that."

"Can we manage so many?"

"I am willing to try; but we shall be wroth to form a better idea when they come up. Hark!"

The sound of voices could now be heard mingling with the trampling of the horses' hoofs, but what was said they could not as yet make out.

As the horsemen came closer, too, it became evident that they were slackening their speed, and when within about twenty yards of the spot where the highwaymen were lying in ambush they stopped altogether.

"Gentlemen," they heard a voice say, "pray listen to me! Surely you must have some degree of compassion?"

"Well, whether we have or not is nothing to do with the present business!" was the gruff reply. "Our orders are clear, and we intend to carry them out."

"Then I hope you will never have to plead as I plead now. Not that I care personally for myself in the slightest degree. It is my poor wife and children that I care about. They will be involved in utter ruin!"

"It's a bad job, that's certain," joined in the third.

"but we cannot help it. You ought not to blame us for it."

"But I do blame you!" was the half-angry response. "Had you chosen to do as I asked, you would have found me on your return."

"Oh, very likely; but we have been played that game too often to think about granting such a request."

The first speaker gave a deep sigh.

"It is a hard case," he cried—"a very hard case, and I am sure the world will join with me in thinking so. But when I first got into Joshua's debt I might have guessed what would be the end."

"Then you ought to have known better, that's all I can say. But, come, we have reached the top of this hill, and our horses have winded themselves nicely, so forward once more, for we have many miles to journey yet."

There was a stir among the horsemen immediately.

Not a word of the preceding conversation had been lost by the two highwaymen, who at first were rather at a loss to comprehend the rights of the affair.

But just as the travellers set themselves in motion, Sixteen-String Jack bent sideways towards his comrade and whispered:

"Put up your pistols, Claude. I have an idea! I can't stay to explain it now; but take my opinion for it that it is good."

"I will do so readily; but what else am I to do?"

"I cannot stop to explain."

"Then I will just back you up in everything you say and do."

"In that case all will be well."

There was not time for another syllable to be exchanged.

But Claude Duval had the most implicit faith in his companion's strategic powers, and so was prepared to follow him blindly.

Nevertheless, Sixteen-String Jack's first movement filled him with surprise.

Riding slowly out from his place of concealment, he accosted the three travellers, who naturally enough shrunk back, half in distrust, half in alarm.

But the first words uttered by Jack served to dispel whatever alarm they might have felt.

"Gentlemen," he said, in an apologetic voice, "excuse us for troubling you, but we happen to be journeying your way, and we should be glad to travel with you for protection's sake, as we have a large amount of money about us."

"We purpose riding as far as Oxford," was the reply given by the man with the gruff voice. "But perhaps you are not going so far?"

"No—we have not much further to ride."

"Then you are welcome to join us."

Sixteen-String Jack then very suitably expressed his thanks, in which he was very well followed up by Claude, who wondered what on earth his comrade's designs were.

They rode on after that for some few moments without speaking.

Sixteen-String Jack broke the silence, as though it was irksome to him.

"I hope you will excuse me for mentioning such a thing," he said, deferentially, "but you must understand that when my friend and myself heard some one on the road before us, we thought the most prudent thing we could do would be to conceal ourselves, hoping by that means, if robbers were abroad seeking for prey, we should escape their notice."

"A very wise precaution," said the one who rode nearest to Claude.

"On the other hand," continued Jack, "we made up our minds that should we find respectable travellers were approaching we would ask them, as a favor, to allow us to ride along in company."

"Just so," said the gruff voice, possibly merely because Jack paused, and he therefore felt it incumbent upon him to say something.

"It was then," added Sixteen-String Jack, in a louder voice, "that I happened to hear a conversation between you—of a very private character I make no doubt—but still I heard it, and, I must confess, it not only interested me, but also stimulated my curiosity to such a degree that I am most anxious to hear more!"

"Then, if that is your desire, it shall be soon gratified," exclaimed the gentleman with the sad voice, joining in the conversation for the first time. "The tale is not a long one, and when you have heard it, it is very strange to me if you do not confess that a case of greater and more unmerited hardship was never laid before you."

"Pray proceed," answered Jack, coming a little closer.

"I am all attention."

"Then," was the reply, "I may just briefly say that I owed a certain person the sum of two hundred pounds. I speak in the past tense, and when you have heard a little more you will say that I do so advisedly."

"Perhaps," interposed the gruff voice. "But, anyhow, you shall have your say first, and then I will have mine afterwards."

"You are quite welcome; but I must first declare that which you cannot deny. When the time came round at which the hundred pounds was due, I was unable to find the money; but I said that if only a short extra time was allowed me it should be forthcoming."

"This was promised, and I set to work most diligently, being determined to make any sacrifice rather than suffer myself to be hauled off to the debtors' jail at Oxford, for this is the fate my stern creditors threatened me with. But I am going too much into detail. I will now lose no time in coming to the point."

"The allotted time expired, and this was at sunset this evening, and my mind was at ease and content, for, by dint of selling off a great deal of my stock at a much reduced price, I managed to collect together the sum of one hundred and two pounds; so, naturally, I felt myself secure. Judge of my surprise when, just about dusk, these two gentlemen—Heaven forgive me for calling them such!—entered my house, and declared they were bailiffs, and that if the money was not paid down to them at once they should remove me to the prison."

"I said at once that there was no need for such threats or boisterous behavior, adding that I had the money ready. While I spoke I took out my money bag and placed it on the table."

"One hundred and twelve pounds we want!" said the gentleman on my right.

"One hundred and twelve?" I repeated. "That is quite a mistake. My debt is no more than one level hundred."

"I know that," was the reply; "but the twelve pounds is for expenses already incurred."

"Expenses? Good Heaven! there was no occasion for anything of the kind! I had been granted a certain prolongation of time, and at its expiry the money was ready. And then to think the expenses should swell up to something like one-eighth part of the whole debt!"

"As you may perhaps understand, sir, I succeeded in making no impression whatever upon these men. The expenses had been incurred, they said, and must be paid."

"Finding this to be the case, I said:

"Well, gentlemen, it will be quite foolish on my part to disguise the truth, and so I confess that all the cash I have in this world is contained in this bag, and the amount is one hundred and two pounds, which I hand over to you."

"I receive that amount on account," said the bailiff. "As for the balance, you must go along with us until you are able to find it."

"What?" I ejaculated, almost bursting with indignation, for my passion had been gradually rising. "Would you carry a man off to the county jail for such a paltry amount as ten pounds?"

"That's our orders," was the only reply I could get. "Make your choice—pay the ten pounds, or come along with us."

"To pay the ten pounds was utterly out of the question, and there was no one to whom I could apply for the loan of the amount."

"In a word, sir, to make a long story short, these men, having received from me the hundred and two pounds, are now dragging me off to jail for the remaining ten pounds. No words have the least effect upon them—they are deaf to every entreaty. I have no doubt but what they will carry out their cruel intention to the very letter, and if so I am a ruined man for ever—nothing but the workhouse stares my wife and children in the face."

The stranger's voice faltered while he spoke, and the last words were almost inarticulate.

"If this is all true," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I do indeed agree with you in saying that a worse case of oppression was never heard of."

"Well, that may be so," said the man with the gruff voice; "but, with all respect to you, sir, it seems to me that a man should never get into debt, but, if he does such a foolish thing, he must abide by the consequences."

"You are welcome to your opinion," replied Jack; "but, for my own part, I am determined that this poor gentleman shall not be carried off to jail."

"Perhaps," said the bailiff, sneeringly, "you would be good enough to let me know how you intend to prevent it?"

"I shall take a very easy means of doing so," replied Jack, "for, rather than allow such an act of oppression to be consummated, I will pay the ten pounds out of my own pocket."

"Then, of course, if you like to do that, there is an end of the matter."

The poor debtor, hearing these words, could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses.

He was for a moment or so struck dumb with surprise.

At last, in a broken, hesitating voice, he did his best to thank Jack for his generosity.

"Now," continued the highwayman, "where can we settle this business? How far is it to the next inn?"

"Not far, if we turn back again," was the bailiff's sulky rejoinder.

"But I cannot consent to allow you to be taken so far out of your way," said the poor gentleman. "Let us journey on."

"Nay," said Jack, "I have set my mind upon freeing you from these men, and it shall be done at the earliest possible moment; so let us retrace our steps."

"It is most extraordinary," murmured the poor gentleman, "that you, a perfect and utter stranger, should be willing to do what not one of my best-known friends would!"

While these words were being spoken, the whole of the party turned their heads in the opposite direction.

Claude found an opportunity to whisper to his comrade.

"What on earth are you after, Jack?" he said.

"Wait a little while, and you will see. I am going to lay out a little money that will pay a very good rate of interest."

There was no chance of saying more, for there was the strong probability that every word that passed their lips would be overheard.

The bailiffs scarcely knew what to think of the affair, but, not seeing how to hint any objections or make any refusal, they pushed on to the inn.

It was situated just at the foot of the hill, and on their arrival Jack called out in a loud voice for a private room.

This was a request not often made in that out-of-the-way place, and it produced an immense effect upon the landlord accordingly.

They were ushered into a tolerably comfortable apartment, and by Jack's orders a plentiful supply of wine was brought in.

His next proceeding was to draw ten guineas from his pocket, which he flung down upon the table with a careless air.

"There," he said, addressing the two bailiffs, "make out your formal discharge, and release this gentleman from your custody."

This was accordingly done, but as soon as ever the matter was completed Jack said, in a stern voice:

"Now, gentlemen, if you will just drink up your cup of wine, we will part, for I don't hesitate to tell you plainly that I would be much rather without your company than with it. As soon as you are gone, this gentleman and myself will settle matters together."

Jack indicated the poor gentleman as he spoke.

The bailiffs were far from pleased with Jack's manner, but they swallowed their wine and their displeasure along with it.

Without any more delay, they then took their depart-

ture, looking very much chastened, and no doubt feeling that they had been very badly done by.

As soon as ever they left the room, Jack sprang from his seat and ran to the window.

He was just in time to see the bailiffs in the act of mounting their horses.

Without appearing to be particularly interested in doing so, he watched carefully the direction they took when they rode off.

"I suppose," he said, returning to the table, that those gentlemen are off to Oxford?"

"Yes, such is no doubt their intention," replied the doctor. "And now, kind sirs," he added, "as I have somewhat recovered myself from my state of surprise, permit me to thank you for what you have done. I cannot express myself as I should, and as I wish; but come with me and see my wife and little ones—they will prove far more eloquent than myself."

"Enough," said Sixteen-String Jack, who several times during this speech endeavored to interrupt the speaker—"you have said already more than enough. What we have done has been done freely, so, if you wish to oblige us, you will say nothing more about it."

"Such is ever the way with true generosity. But now what bond or deed shall I draw up as some security to you for the loan of the money?"

"None at all. I will not permit anything of the sort. Wait till I am in want of the cash, then I will call upon you. And now good evening. You have not tasted your glass—doubtless you are impatient to get homewards. As for us, time presses, and so, if you will excuse us, farewell!"

The poor gentleman again, to the best of his ability, poured out his thanks, but Jack made a very rapid exit from the room.

He was closely followed by Claude, to whom he said, in a low voice:

"Follow me. The sooner we are in the saddle now the better."

He led the way while he spoke to the front part of the inn, where, in accordance with their instructions, the horses had been left in charge of the ostler.

Without any delay or hindrance whatever, the highwaymen mounted.

Jack turned his horse's head in the direction of Oxford, and set forward at a sharp trot.

Claude lost not a moment in placing himself by his side.

"What on earth does all this mean?" he inquired.

"Cannot you guess?"

"I think I could if I tried; but explain yourself—that will be much more satisfactory."

"I am going to do so. Listen!"

"Say on—I am paying the utmost attention."

"That gentleman at the inn must think us a couple of eccentric personages. Still, we have done him a very good service, and, as I believe, prevented the execution of a great piece of injustice. But the end I had in view was a profitable one."

"I thought so."

"We know now that these two men are on their way before us—we have also certain knowledge of the route they carry about their persons, so denial will be about as foolish as it will be out of the question."

"Forward, then!" said Claude. "The sooner we overtake them the better!"

"Just so; and, if you are at all in the same mind as myself, it will afford you the keenest satisfaction to compel these rascally tipstaves to disgorge their money."

"But we sha'n't get the poor gentleman into trouble again, shall we?"

"Certainly not! If he has their receipt he can hold himself clear."

"Then that's all right. And now, Jack, for a gallop for, if you will believe me, my fingers positively itch to have the handling of some of those fellows' gold!"

"The same here!" replied Jack, and as he spoke he touched his horse rather sharply with the spur.

Claude did the like, and in less than a second afterwards the highwaymen were tearing along the road at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

CHAPTER CMLXXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK COMPEL THE
TWO BAILIFFS TO DISGORGE THEIR GOLD

ERE long, our two friends were able to catch the sound of horses' hoofs on the roadway before them, and immediately making the discovery they gently reined-in their horses.

When their pace had subsided to a canter, Claude and Jack perceived the forms of the bailiffs before them.

By their manner, it would seem as though they had heard the highwaymen's furious approach, for they had drawn as close as they could get to one side of the road in order to leave a free passage.

Not for a moment, however, did they guess what Fate had in store for them.

It was, then, much to their astonishment and dismay that they found the two new-comers ride up to them, pistols in hand.

"Now, you rascals," cried Jack, in a somewhat excited voice, "we will come to a bit of a settlement!"

"Settlement?" ejaculated the one with the gruff voice. "What do you mean, sir? I thought all matters were perfectly settled between us?"

"Then all I can say is," returned Jack, "that you have made a very great mistake!"

"Yes," added Claude. "Hand over every farthing you have about you, or, as sure as you are rascally tipstaves, these pistols shall make an end of you!"

"But we have nothing—absolutely nothing, except the money we have just received, and surely you would not rob us of that? Why, it would be our ruin!"

"I can't help that!" said Jack. "It would have been ruin to that poor gentleman if you had dragged him off to prison. But that made no impression upon you, so you cannot expect any different conduct from us."

"Drop that!" cried Claude, with great suddenness, and at the same time that he pronounced the words he struck one of the bailiffs a heavy blow upon the knuckles with the butt-end of a pistol.

A roar of pain followed, and the man's grasp relaxed, allowed the pistol which he had drawn stealthily from his pocket to fall to the ground, where it immediately exploded.

Fortunately, no danger was done either to our friends or their horses.

"You thought my eyes were off you, did you?" exclaimed Claude. "Take my advice, instead of making any foolish resistance, hand over the cash!"

"But, gentlemen——" they began, expostulatingly.

"Silence!" roared Claude, at the top of his voice. "Hand over at once, or we will blow your brains out first and then empty your pockets afterwards, which will be quite as troublesome and disagreeable to you as to us, I can assure you!"

With a heavy sigh one took from his pocket a crown-piece and dropped it into Claude's hand, who asked immediately:

"What is that for?"

"I assure you, sir, it is all I have——"

"Bah!"

"All I have of my own."

"I see there is no help for it," said Jack, deliberately cocking his pistol while he spoke. "They won't listen to reason. Down with yours!"

"Jim—Jim!" yelled one, as soon as Jack levelled his pistol. "Give up the dubs! Don't be a fool! I won't sit here and be shot—no, not for ten times a hundred pound!"

Finding that the highwaymen were terribly in earnest, the other bailiff most reluctantly plunged his hand into an inner pocket, from which he drew forth a large and apparently very heavy bag.

Jack snatched it away from him in a moment.

"We're ruined," they both cried together—"ruined completely! What can be done?"

"Why, rejoice to think you have got off so lightly."

"Hurray!" cried the one with the gruff voice, and abruptly changing his manner. "Hurray! Help—help! Highwaymen and thieves! Help—help!"

This sudden outcry took the highwaymen slightly by surprise, but turning their heads in the direction the bailiff was looking they perceived a small troop of horse-

men approaching who looked suspiciously like police officers.

"Off and away, Jack," cried Claude Duval. "Let us be satisfied with what we have. It would be worse than folly to remain any longer."

"Follow me then," was the reply. "I can hear some vehicle on the road before us."

So saying, Sixteen-String Jack made his horse face the low-growing hedge which divided one side of the roadway from a green, undulating meadow.

His horse leaped the obstruction easily, and so did Claude's.

Nothing but soft, springy turf being beneath them, they urged their horses onward at the utmost speed they were capable of.

The sharp report of a pistol and the sound of many voices made them aware that the officers had in good earnest begun the pursuit.

The discharge of the pistol was a foolish act, for though the highwaymen were not far off, yet they were out of range.

Nevertheless, it made the highwaymen turn their heads and look behind them.

To their unalloyed gratification, they then perceived that nearly half the officers had come to grief in attempting to overleap the hedgerow.

But those whose horses had succeeded in keeping their footing commenced the chase with a great show of animation and courage.

Well mounted as the highwaymen were, however, it quickly became apparent that the officers had not the ghost of a chance of overtaking them unless some unlooked-for accident should occur.

But yet it was also beyond doubt that they would be able to hang on in the rear of the two friends until they met with some additional assistance.

This Claude and Jack determined to prevent if possible, so they did not scruple to push their horses onwards to the utmost of their power.

In a short time, then, they had the satisfaction of finding that the distance between themselves and their foes had visibly increased, and after the lapse of another quarter of an hour they could not, when they looked back, detect any signs of them.

"All right!" cried Claude. "Pull in, Jack; don't you see there is a village or town before us? If we ride through it at full speed we shall cause such a prodigious clatter that all the inhabitants will be aroused."

The highwaymen had quitted the fields and entered upon what seemed to be the high-road.

Claude's advice was too good to be neglected, so Jack pulled up at once.

"We will go at a walk," he said, wiping the perspiration from his face. "It will enable our horses to recover themselves a little; we have pressed them hard."

This was a palpable fact, for both animals showed unmistakable signs of being greatly exhausted and distressed.

Quite at a gentle walk, then, the highwaymen approached the village.

A profound silence prevailed in the long, straggling street—not a light was anywhere to be seen. The inhabitants had been doubtless fast asleep for many hours.

They passed on without exciting the least observation, but just as they were about to pass out into the open country again, both heard distinctly a low cry of anguish or sorrow.

It was so dark around that for some moments they could not perceive from whom the cry proceeded, but a repetition of it enabled them to discern a dark figure that was crouching down near a doorway.

Whether male or female it was not possible for them at that distance to say, but as if actuated by the same impulse the highwaymen drew nearer.

Aroused probably by their approach, the figure quitted its crouching position and stood upright.

They then found it to be a female.

She was still entitled to be called young, out her face was hollow and pinched, and her scanty clothing disclosed how much her person was emaciated.

She held what seemed to be a bundle of rags in her arms, and but for a faint wailing cry which at this moment broke forth, the highwaymen would no doubt have considered it to be nothing else.

"My good woman," said Sixteen-String Jack, in a kindly voice, "what can you be doing here in the street at this lonely hour of the night?"

For a moment there was a silence.

Then, in a husky voice, the woman replied:

"Alas, sir, I am destitute—nothing to eat—nowhere to lay my head—nothing for 'his poor little one, who is half dead with cold and hunger. I have knocked and rung repeatedly at this door, and cannot gain admittance."

The two highwaymen looked up at these words, and then they noticed that they were standing in front of a large and gloomy-looking building.

"What place is it?"

"The workhouse, sir" was the answer given, reluctantly, as though from shame.

"And do you mean to tell me," cried Sixteen-String Jack, "that, at this place, erected purposely for the relief of the destitute, you cannot gain an entrance? Would they leave you here to perish on the very threshold?"

"I fear their hearts are hard enough, sir. The beadle, who seems in command, appears dead to pity. He cursed me for disturbing his night's rest, and finished by telling me to move off, as this was not my parish. Then he slammed the door, and I, faint, sick, and broken-hearted, sank down here, unable to proceed another step."

No words of ours could possibly express in any degree the amount of indignation which these words excited in the breasts of the two friends.

"It is monstrous—abominable!" Sixteen-String Jack managed to say at length. "But they shall repent this harshness! Where's the bell?"

He slipped from his horse while he spoke, leaving his companion to take care of it.

A very brief search indeed enabled him to find the bell-handle.

Seizing it tightly, he pulled it up and down with the full vigor of his arm. While doing so, it seemed to him as though his anger was finding an outlet.

Most assiduously never such a peal had been rung upon that bell since a clapper first hung within it.

The clangor was tremendous.

Then, becoming more accustomed to the darkness, he perceived a massive iron knocker.

This he grasped with his left hand, and pounded away with all his might, while the clanging of the bell seemed to grow louder and louder.

Very soon there were signs that the inmates of the workhouse were alarmed.

Then came the sound of the opening of a door, accompanied by a heavy footstep and a flash of light.

"Hullo, there!" said a thick, wheezy voice—"hullo! What the devil is the matter? Is the place afire? D—n it all, I say, what's the matter?"

Just as these words were pronounced the little wicket in the centre of the outer door was thrown back.

The aperture which it disclosed was strongly barred with iron.

On the other side of this grating appeared the florid countenance of a man, who rejoiced in a huge carbuncled nose and a dirty red woollen nightcap.

"D—n it all!" he said again, as he held up the light.

"Did I speak, or did the wind blow, eh? What's the matter?"

The woman hearing this, to her, all-dreaded voice, shrank back in fear.

"Can you ask what is the matter," said Jack, sternly, "when you know so well? Why, a human being, a fellow-creature is dying at your gates of cold and starvation—that's what's the matter."

"Good Evvings!" ejaculated the beadle, drawing a long breath. "To think that I should live to hear such words! A pauper! Oh, am I alive? Well, curse your impudence! Stay there till you rot, and be d—d to you!"

With these words the parochial functionary shut the little wicket again, and stalked back with a heavy, and what he fully believed in his own self-conceit was a majestic step.

Sixteen-String Jack was so completely taken aback by this reception that he stood for a moment after the beadle had retired more like a man in a dream than awake and in full possession of his senses.

"Can this be possible?" he at last ejaculated. "Confound the rascal! I wish I had him on this side of the doorway. I would quickly make him alter his tone."

"Alas, sir," said the woman, "it is quite in vain for you to trouble yourself. He will not let me in."

"We will have another word or two to the bargain, then."

With these words, Jack once more seized upon the bell and knocker, and, if such a thing could be possible, plied them more vigorously than before.

"It is quite useless, Jack," said Claude, with difficulty making his voice heard. "He will not attend to you again, or if he comes, it will only be to repeat his former insolence."

Jack felt the truth of this, and knew, besides, that he was losing time—moreover, it was most impolitic on their parts to go up such a disturbance, and so bring people around them.

But, for all that, Jack said:

"I must get him to come out once more, and when he does, if I don't give him pepper, call me a fool."

"But what can you do while he is on one side of the gate, and you on the other?"

"You will soon see."

"Oh, gentlemen," cried the woman, much alarmed, "pray take my advice and go away! You cannot do me any good, and you will only get yourselves into trouble."

But Jack paid no attention whatever to her supplications.

Claude looked to see what he was about.

To his surprise, Jack had taken his powder-flask from his pocket, and was busily occupied in placing it upon the ledge of the wicket. He found there was just room for one measureful of powder in between each bar.

"There," he said, as, having finished, he restored the powder flask complacently to his pocket. "I only hope he will put his ugly old nose as close to the bars as he did the last time. If he does, I'll warm it for him!"

"What do you mean to do, Jack?"

"Can't you see?"

"You had better come away."

"Not just yet. Here goes again!"

Jack thereupon began tolling away at the bell at such a rate as would make it quite an impossibility for anyone to remain in the house and listen to it.

As he fully expected, before he had been going at it long the beadle again made his appearance.

His wrath now was something terrific.

He flung open the door of the little wicket, and peered through the grating.

"Well, d—n you impudence!" he exclaimed. "The end of the world has come now, sure enough! Be off, curse you—be off! I'll call the watch, and have you locked up! You're druuk—mad drunk, both of you! What do you mean by disturbing me at this time of night, eh?"

"Because," said Jack, "a woman happens to be dying at your gate for want of sustenance."

"Then let her die, and rot, and you and all! Ah! I can hear some one coming! Now we shall have an alteration, I'll warrant. Here, watch—watch, I say!"

There was certainly some one approaching from the village, the inhabitants of which had doubtless been aroused by the unusual clamor.

But the beadle, little thinking of the trifling retribution that was in store for him, pressed his face close to the bars of the wicket, and bawled with all his might.

This was the opportunity Jack was waiting for.

Already he held in his hand a lighted thieves' match, such as the highwaymen always carried, though, owing to the manner in which he held it, it was invisible to the beadle.

The latter, in shouting out, blew away some portion of the gunpowder, but not much.

Jack touched some of the black grains with the match.

There was a brilliant flash, a puff of white smoke, and afterwards what seemed to be a double darkness.

The beadle uttered one of the most awful yells that the imagination of man can possibly conceive.

At first he was deprived of sight. "Fire—murder!" he screamed. "Oh, murder—fire! Help—help! Ten thousand curses! I'm blinded and scorched! Where am I?—where are you all? Where's the door? D—n it all, can't none of you speak?"

The agony and pain which the beadle endured was certainly terrible, yet no more than he deserved, for all his life he had ever been readiest in inflicting pain upon others.

"The village is up in arms!" said Claude Duval at this moment, in a low voice. "Come, Jack, we must be off."

"Right! I'll be with you in a moment. Here, my good woman," he added—"here is gold. Take care of it, and procure what you require. Farewell!"

Jack then sprang quickly on to his horse's back.

After doing so he gave just one glance behind him.

Then he saw approaching a dense crowd of persons armed with weapons of every possible description.

Many carried lanterns.

"There will be a slight commotion in the village after this, depend upon it," Jack said, as he set his steed in motion. "On, Claude! We will leave the beadle to explain matters to the best of his ability."

Claude did not reply, but, spurring his horse, followed his friend.

When they drew rein again, it was at a considerable distance from the village.

"I think we have had enough for one night, Claude," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, as he looked around him. "What say you?"

"The same, for I can already see the coming of the dawn."

"Then we will make the best of our way to the old castle. At this hour, ten to one if we see anyone. Are you willing?"

"Quite. We ought never to venture to approach the place by daylight. If we are careful in this respect we may remain concealed there for a long, long time."

CHAPTER CMXC.

TOM KING AND MAUD HAVE AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE AT THE RUINS.

PRECEDING the two highwaymen in their return, we will narrate the events of that same night as witnessed by those who had been left behind at the ruined castle.

These, as the reader will scarcely need reminding, consisted of Maud, Tom King, and the new ally of our friends, Jack the ostler.

A more useful fellow than the latter the highwaymen could not possibly have met with; but what was most important was the fact that his fidelity had been well tried, and there was little fear that they would suffer betrayal at his hands.

After the three highwaymen had departed upon their excursions, he took up his station at a point which enabled him to command the most extensive view of the surrounding country, and there remained patiently on the watch waiting for their return.

As for Maud, it was with the greatest depression of spirits that she witnessed Dick Turpin take his departure.

A thousand years thronged into her mind, and, strive as she would, she could not banish them.

She stood watching his retreating figure until the trees hid him from her sight; then, with a heavy sigh, she made her way to the underground chamber, there to count the moments until his return.

The presence of Tom King she was most thankful for. In her present state of mind she felt that solitude was a thing that she could least of all endure.

Tom's wand, though better, was still most troublesome.

The fact is, he stood in need of proper skilful treatment—just the very thing he could not possibly obtain.

Time might bring him round again; but on this particular night he felt extremely weak, and he was conscious that he was by no means out of danger.

The conversation with which Maud and himself whiled away the time until close upon the hour of midnight was

not sufficiently important to be worthy of record; but at the time just mentioned they were both startled by the rather hurried entrance of the ostler.

They could tell by his manner and the expression of his face that something was amiss.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Tom King. "Speak quickly."

"There may be no cause for apprehension, but——"

"What have you seen?"

Why, a few moments ago, as the air was so very still, I caught the sound of carriage wheels. I soon found the vehicle was approaching, and then it was stopped under the shadow of a clump of trees close to the castle boundary."

"A carriage?" echoed Maud, inquiringly, and in great amazement. "What kind of one?"

"A close, shut-up one—a regular gentleman's carriage."

"What next?" asked Tom.

"I crept closer, and saw descend from it a tall, powerful-looking man; but I could make out nothing else, owing to the darkness and the long cloak he is wrapped up in."

"Then," said Tom King, rather languidly, for the excitement which had lent him a temporary strength soon abated, "I do not see that it much concerns us."

"Well, captain, it may not, but I thought it my duty to let you know of it; besides, the gentleman came walking on as though he intended to pay us a visit."

"Then it is more serious than I thought," said Tom King, arousing himself. "We will watch his movements."

"I am sure it will be best to do so, captain."

"Go on, then. I will follow."

"And I as well," said Maud—"I as well. I could not bear to be left by myself in this dreary, underground place."

Tom King did not say a word by way of objection, so she followed him closely.

The open air was soon reached, and then, with much caution and stealthiness, Jack the ostler directed their footsteps towards a crumbling wall at some little distance.

This wall was pierced by a dismantled window, and it was from this point of espial the faithful fellow had observed the stranger's approach.

Certainly there was something strange and highly provocative of curiosity in the fact that anyone should be about to pay the ruins a visit at such an hour.

It was, then, with great eagerness that all peered through the dilapidated casements.

Their ears gave them the first intimation that some one was at hand, for they caught the sound of a voice, and immediately afterwards the unmistakable rustling sound that was produced when anyone walked through the rank, luxuriant grass with which the ground in and around the castle was covered.

"Hush!" said Tom King, in a faint whisper. "Do not speak or move, either of you, on any account. But listen to all with the utmost attention."

The fears of the three watchers suggested that those who were approaching were persons who, by some means or other, had scented out their place of retreat, and had now come to reconnoitre preparatory to an attack.

But this notion was at once dispelled when they saw come into view the stranger that the ostler had described.

He was still shrouded in his long roquelaure cloak; but ~~was~~ the ostler had not mentioned, and what at once raised their interest to the keenest point, was the fact that he led by one hand a little child, which proved to be a girl.

Her age could not have exceeded eight years, at the most—perhaps she was not so old, for she was tall and slender, though full of grace.

Above all, however, Tom noticed her fairy-like appearance, and the manner in which she clasped her companion's huge hand with both her own tiny ones was touching to see.

Tom thought what a loving little creature it was, and a strange longing sprang up in his breast to have such a little child to love, cherish, and protect.

After the pair came in sight there was a pause in the

conversation; but the silence was broken by the little girl.

She looked up into her companion's face, and then, in inexpressibly sweet and silvery accents, she said:

"But what a strange, lonely place it is! And oh, I am so very, very cold!"

She shivered as she pronounced the words, for she was but thinly clad—her dress seeming rather suited for some fashionable assembly than for the open air. On her head, too, the watchers noticed she had nothing but a wreath of flowers and leaves.

"Are you going much further?" she asked; then, finding that her question met with no response, she went on: "Oh, do let us turn back! Don't go any further—please don't!"

"Don't be silly, Ruth! Come on!"

"How cross you speak, uncle. Oh, what a dreary place! Hold me tightly, I feel so afraid!"

"Afraid of what?" said the man, snappishly and angrily. "Don't let me have any more of your nonsense. Hold your tongue till I tell you to speak! Now come along!"

The tears rose quickly into the eyes of the little girl, and, with a sob that she could not repress, and which made Tom's heart feel as though it was breaking, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Don't cry," said her uncle. "Do you hear me? Don't cry!"

He shook her half savagely while he spoke.

This was a scene which neither Tom King nor Maud could look upon with anything like common patience.

It was only by exercising the strongest possible control over themselves that they resisted their inclination to interfere.

But they felt how important it was that their presence in that place should be not only unknown, but unsuspected.

Not only their own safety, but that of their absent companions depended upon it.

It was this powerful consideration that enabled Maud and Tom King to have the moral strength necessary to enable them to remain mere passive spectators of the scene.

In perfect silence the strange pair came walking on, and if there had been any doubt of their destination it could no longer have existence, for by this time they were fairly within what might be termed the outer portion of the ruins.

In vain our friends tried to come to some conclusion respecting the object of this midnight visit.

Only one idea presented itself to them, and that was of such a truly horrible and abhorrent nature that they strove to banish it from their minds.

But the whole of their attention was now attracted to the little girl's uncle, who began to speak.

"If you had not made me so cross and angry," he began, adopting a conciliatory tone, "I should have told you long ago what I am bringing you here to-night for. Will you be good if I tell you now?"

"Yes, uncle, I will—indeed I will!"

The stranger cleared his throat, as though he had some disagreeable communication to make, or as though his words, like Macbeth's amen, "stuck in his throat."

"Well, Ruth, when your father and mother were alive—There now, you are crying again. Be good, or I will not tell you any more."

With much difficulty the little creature controlled her emotions.

"When they were alive—you were a little thing then—so little that you cannot recollect them—"

"Oh, but I can, uncle!"

He went on without heeding the interruption.

"They left you in my care to bring up for them. I have done so till now. You are just seven years old, are you not?"

"Yes, to-day, uncle."

"Exactly. Well, then, if you had died before reaching your seventh year, then all the money and property belonging to your parents would have—would have gone—gone to me!"

The last words were only brought out by a great effort.

"Yes, uncle."

"But, you see, you are alive, and so, according to

the wish of your poor father and mother, I have brought you here on this your seventh birthday."

"And did they really wish you to bring me here?" the young girl asked, looking all about her with a half shudder.

"Of course they did. Have I not said so?"

"And at this late hour of the night?"

"Yes."

"But what for, uncle?"

"Because—because there is in this place a large amount of money and jewels, all of which belong to you, and which, according to your parents' wish, were not to be touched by anyone but yourself."

"In the ruin?" said the girl, incredulously.

"Yes, in this ruin. And pray, may I ask, what right you have to call into account any of your parents' actions, who were so much older than you, and therefore so much the better able to judge what was best?"

This rebuke had the effect of causing the child to be silent.

Her uncle, however, quickly spoke again.

"Come on!" he cried. "We are close to the place now, and when we have once taken possession of the treasure we will make haste back to the carriage."

With a palpable amount of reluctance Ruth accompanied her guardian still further into the recesses of the ruins.

Young as the child was, she seemed to be conscious that there was something highly improbable and untruthlike in the communication her uncle had just made to her.

But, if such were her thoughts, she did not give them utterance, or it may be that it was only a vague, indefinable presentiment of coming evil that cast its influence over her spirit.

"Uncle," she said, after a short interval, during which she seemed to have been reflecting deeply, "and when we have got this money, what is to be done with it?"

"There is time enough to consider that point, my dear. But look! Here, I believe, is the entrance to the chamber that was described."

Now Tom King had come to the conclusion that all which this man had told the child was false; but this belief was shaken when he saw him take a large key from his pocket and insert it into the lock of a door which was half hidden in a thick wall.

With some difficulty the key was turned.

He pushed the door open a little way.

The child shrank back in natural terror when she saw the black-looking place in front of her.

"Now, Ruth," said her uncle, speaking in a high, cracked voice, as though he was laboring under a very unusual amount of excitement—"now, Ruth my dear, enter!"

"But it is dark—so very dark!"

"No matter for that. I will stand here, and you will be able to find the treasure easily."

"You come in as well, uncle," she exclaimed, shrinking back still more.

"No, no—remember what I told you. You, and you alone, must touch this treasure!"

"Then get a light that I may see."

"No—it is needless. Come, do not delay so much time! It is too cold to remain here unnecessarily. Go in! What do you fear?"

She did not reply; but she asked him a question:

"Uncle, do you say that this treasure is all mine?"

"It is all yours."

"Wholly?"

"Yes, wholly."

"And without any reserve?"

"Yes. But why all these questions?"

"And I can do with it just whatever I like?"

"Yes—yes," he answered, impatiently.

"Then, uncle, come away. Let it remain where it is. I do not want it. I would rather give it up a thousand times than enter that dark place to fetch it."

Her companion stamped his foot impatiently.

"Ungrateful, forward, perverse wretch!" he said. "How dare you thus set yourself up in defiance of everyone! Enter at once, I say—enter at once!"

"No—no, uncle!"

"But I say yes; and what is more, I am determined that you shall!"



[TOM KING WATCHES THE ARRIVAL OF MATTHEW'S LETTER.]

"Oh, why do you look at me so wildly? Why do you speak thus? What dreadful change has come over your face? Oh, help—help! Uncle, spare me—oh, spare me!"

Terrified beyond a doubt by the expression of her uncle's countenance—an expression which showed all too plainly what his diabolical intentions were—the young girl thus sent forth her appeal for aid.

He shook her violently, and in his strong hands she was little more than a feather.

"Silence," he said, in a suppressed voice, between his teeth—"Silence, you little wretch! How dare you make such an outcry? Silence, I say!"

"Oh, uncle, what would you do?"

"Compel you to be obedient! Do as I tell you, or I will use force! I am determined to be obeyed!"

But though his harsh, guttural voice betokened so much determination, the child held back, as though she knew that to obey would only seal her own destruction.

No. 206.—BLACK BESS.

Finding this to be the case, the villain grasped her tightly, and dragged her towards the much-dreaded portal.

But no sooner did the child feel his hands thus harshly laid upon her, than she seemed to become all in a moment conscious of her frightful peril.

"Help—help!" she screamed. "Oh, uncle, would you murder me? Alas—alas, there is no need for any such harsh measures! I will give you freely all that you will gain by my death. I will pay you that much if you will only spare my life! Oh, uncle—have mercy—have me—"

With an angry exclamation the monster dashed his hand violently before her mouth, thus in a moment stifling that voice which should always have sounded in his ears like the sweetest music.

The little thing struggled desperately again at her impending fate.

"The instinct of life was strong within her, and she made efforts of which, under any other circumstances, she would have been totally incapable.

But as well might a fly have endeavored to cope successfully with a giant.

Half dragging, half pushing her along the ground, he forced her to the dark, tomb-like doorway.

The nearer she came to it, the more fearful became her struggles.

"Now, wretch," he cried, in a voice which well displayed the malevolence that was pent up in his soul—"now, wretch, begone! You shall trouble and haunt me no more!"

As he pronounced these words, he suddenly released his grasp.

Then, without the delay of a single moment, he pushed her violently forward.

The child staggered—endeavored to stop herself—to gain a footing.

All in vain.

With a shrill, ringing shriek, that echoed and re-echoed through the ruins, she fell headforemost across the threshold.

But the shriek was abruptly cut short by the violent closing of the door.

The key was turned in the lock.

"It is done," said the stranger, in a loud, exultant voice—"it is done, and thus, by one bold stroke, I free myself from all those disagreeable complications in which I was involved. Free—free—I am now free! I am a new man! With this child's wealth I shall succeed in all my plans! I—I tremble now; but the time will shortly come when I shall look back upon this as being the best night's work that ever was performed!"

CHAPTER CXXI.

TOM KING RESCUES THE LITTLE GIRL FROM HER LIVING TOMB.

It was perfectly certain that the stranger fully and entirely believed that he was all alone in the old ruins—that no human eyes had witnessed the awful crime which he had just perpetrated, for he had taken the greatest pains to make sure that no one had followed in his track.

That some one might have taken up a station in the ruins before his arrival was a thought that never entered his imagination.

Therefore it was that he ventured to give vent to his thoughts aloud.

At this moment there arose a faint, low cry, seeming to come from a long distance off.

"Uncle—uncle!"

"Yes, my dear!"

The reply had a refinement of cruelty in its tone.

"Uncle—uncle!"

"I hear you."

"Let me out—oh, do let me out of this dreadful place!"

"You must wait, my dear, and look about for the treasure, and by the time you have found it I shall be back to let you out."

With these words on his lips the stranger turned away.

He assumed for a moment a listening attitude, then, with a satisfied air, rapidly retraced his steps towards the spot where he had left the carriage.

Tom King touched the ostler on the shoulder.

In a suppressed voice, which told plainly enough how much he was agitated by what had just taken place, he said:

"Jack, follow that man! Watch closely where he goes, and do not return until you have housed him."

The ostler merely gave a nod to show he fully comprehended the nature of the service that was required of him, and at once glided off in the direction taken by the stranger.

We have not interrupted the narration of the course of events to show how and to what extent the spectators of this scene were influenced by it.

From what the reader already knows of the dispositions of Tom King and Maud it may be safely assumed that it was only by the exercise of the utmost self-control that they forebore from interruption.

Indeed, Tom King once did start forward, determined that the act of iniquity should not be perpetrated; but the ostler, divining his intention, touched him on the shoulder, and whispered:

"Keep still a moment, captain! For Heaven's sake do not let him know that we are here!"

This consideration came just in time, and Tom King paused.

But Maud once or twice felt as though she could not tamely remain there a passive looker-on, and several times a shriek rose to her lips; but on each occasion she stifled its utterance, being enabled to do so by recollecting that Dick's safety depended upon her discretion.

When, however, Tom was able to comprehend what kind of death the stranger intended to inflict upon the young girl, he grew more self-composed, though inwardly he execrated the refined barbarity of the man who could thus, without the least remorse, doom so fair and beautiful a creature to a lingering death by starvation, and longed to be able to mete out to him such a retribution as he fully deserved.

But, fortunately, even under these trying circumstances, Tom King retained sufficient presence of mind to remember and be aware that he should actually be of more real and permanent service to the little child by liberating her after her uncle's departure than he could by any sudden or violent interference.

No sooner, then, had the form of the ostler become lost to sight in the distance than he hurried towards the door of what the stranger had meant to be a living tomb.

Maud followed him with clasped hands, tearful eyes, and a wildly-beating heart.

All the womanly affection in Maud's nature was called forth on behalf of this young girl, for whom she already felt a most loving regard.

Both to her and to Tom King it was the greatest mystery how anyone could be of so barbarous and inhuman a nature to treat anything so loving and fairy-like with anything save tenderness and kindness.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "quick—quick! Do not lose a moment more than you can help! Haste—haste! Let the little darling free!"

"Can you hear her?"

Maud listened intently.

But all was still.

No faint cry came from the other side of the massive door.

"Oh, Heaven!" Maud shrieked, in alarm, "she is dead—alas, alas, she is dead!"

"No—no," cried Tom. "But hush! You cannot be too cautious, and I am by no means certain that we are yet out of all danger of being overheard."

"Yes, yes, I will be cautious. But speak to her—call her!"

Tom obeyed.

But the same silence continued.

"Oh, Tom," Maud moaned, "if she should prove to be dead I shall never forgive myself for not having interfered before. I shall always blame myself for being swayed by purely selfish considerations."

"You have no cause as yet to reproach yourself," said Tom King, who was busily at work upon the lock of the door. "She cannot as yet be dead, but her extreme terror may have caused her to fall into a swoon!"

This supposition was so reasonable a one that Maud immediately became calm again.

What was more likely to have happened?

"Should you mind leaving me a moment?" asked Tom.

"Why—what for?"

"To fetch a light. You will get one down below; and when provided with that I shall doubtless be able to open the door; but now, in the darkness the lock baffles me!"

Maud did not wait to give any verbal answer to this request, but bounded off at once in the direction of the underground apartment, if we may venture to bestow upon it so ambitious a designation.

Indeed, she scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of Tom's speech. She was only too much delighted to find herself in the position to be able to render the little girl a better service than standing idly by and looking on.

But, rapid as she was in her movements, she found that by the time she returned Tom King had managed to open the door.

He took the light from her hand, however, and held it above his head, so as to light up as well as possible the place into which he was about to enter.

It was lucky that he took this precaution, for he stepped back with a cry of horror.

"What is it?" asked Maud—"oh, what is it?"

"Not so bad as I thought," answered Tom, who by this time had taken a second glance. "I thought the flooring of this place was many feet below the level of this ground, but I see now it is only a few inches."

Tom might well be excused for making this mistake.

The fact was, however, as he had stated.

There was one step down from the door sill into this chamber; but he found it rather a steep one.

He descended at once, however, and the first thing that met his gaze was the little girl lying at full length on the damp flooring, to all appearances utterly bereft of life.

Again surrendering the light to Maud, he stooped down and picked up the insensible burden in his arms.

So light and fairy-like was she, that he carried her almost without being sensible of her weight.

With a quick step Maud led the way, and in a few seconds the subterranean chamber was reached.

The girl was at once placed down before the brightly-burning fire.

"Does she live?" asked Maud, bending anxiously over her.

"She does—I believe she does. But look! The poor little thing has injured herself in her fall."

While Tom spoke, he pointed to a slight gash in the girl's forehead, from which the blood was slowly oozing.

Both now in good earnest set themselves to work to restore her to consciousness, and after a time their efforts were crowned with complete success.

The child opened her eyes and looked around her—at first with signs of fear, and afterwards of wonder.

When she saw the two anxious faces bending down over her with kindness visible in every lineament, her apprehension vanished.

"I am dreaming," she said, gently, as she closed her eyes again. "Yes, surely only dreaming. I might have known that nothing half so terrible could possibly be true."

Tom made a rapid sign for Maud not to speak. He was aware that before long the little girl would thoroughly recover possession of her senses, and that until then it would be by far the best to leave her to herself.

In a minute more, during which profound silence was preserved, the little girl opened her eyes again.

She glanced around, and the strange appearance of the place in which she thus suddenly and unexpectedly found herself affected her much.

Again a look of terror overspread her countenance, and she cried:

"Oh, what place is this? Where am I? Alas—alas, then it was no dream!"

"Compose yourself," said Maud, bending down nearer to her. "Do not be afraid—there is no occasion for fear. You are among friends—friends who will protect you and stand by you to the last!"

"Yes—yes," said Tom—"keep calm and still, and endeavor to compose your thoughts. I repeat that you have nothing to be afraid of now."

The assuring words, and the gentle tones in which they were spoken, produced a due effect, and it was truly touching to observe the great efforts the little child made to recover something like an ordinary amount of calmness.

She grew better rapidly, and even ventured to rise herself upon one arm and look around her.

As she did so, her eyes expanded in silent wonder.

It was evident that never before had she been the inmate of so strange a place.

"Tell me," she said, as, after looking well around, she sank back into her former position by the fire—"oh, tell me where I am and what has happened?"

"Now draw back in order that Maud might reply."

"I can only tell you that you are with those who will keep you in perfect safety."

"My uncle!"

The words were pronounced in evident fear, and accompanied by a fearful glance around the subterranean chamber.

"Even he cannot find you here, and harm you."

"Oh, it is terrible," the child said, with a shudder—"so terrible that I can scarcely think it anything but a dream!"

"It is no dream," said Maud; "but a sad reality. But tell me—your name is Ruth, is it not?"

"It is. But how could you know it?"

"I heard your uncle call you so."

"In the ruins?"

"Yes."

But he told me we were quite alone."

"He thought so, but was mistaken. We were concealed, and witnessed all."

Ruth began to weep and sob bitterly.

She was, in fact, beginning to comprehend her true position.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned. "Oh, what will become of me? Where shall I go?"

"Do not trouble yourself about that," answered Maud, quickly. "For the present you must remain here with us. When you feel better we will consider what is to be done in the future. If you could sleep now it would be so much better. Rely upon it we will guard you well, so do not be afraid to close your eyes in slumber."

Ruth listened dreamily.

She was greatly exhausted mentally and physically, and no wonder, after all she had gone through. Moreover, the warmth of the place was enough to draw her into a slumber.

It was not long, then, before her eyes closed and she became lost in the unconsciousness of sleep.

For some time Maud and Tom King remained silent, fearful if they spoke that the sound of their voices should disturb her.

"The night is going fast," said Tom King. "Surely before long we shall hear something of the absent ones."

Maud started, for she had become so deeply interested in the fate of the poor orphan that for a time the recollection of everything else was driven from her mind.

"Yes," she said, with an anxious sigh. "Let us hope they will return in safety."

"I have little fear of that."

"But how surprised they will all be when they see this little stranger among us."

"They will. But what I chiefly hope is that the ostler will be able to follow that carriage to its destination. If he does so—no matter at what personal risk to myself—I will take such steps as will unmask the uncle's villainy! No doubt he now rejoices in the successful accomplishment of his heinous designs; but he shall be awakened from his state of false security!"

"He is a monster in human shape!" said Maud. "None other could perpetrate such a deed. Look at her now, and ask yourself what kind of a wretch must the man be who would harm her!"

"I feel with you, Maud."

"But think what a refinement of cruelty it was to work upon her feelings with such a specious tale as he did, and then doom her to a lingering death by starvation!"

"That is where he made his great mistake, and, surely, Maud, if this little heiress is restored to her rights by our instrumentality that will be a kind of set-off against our other deeds against society."

Maud, at these words, was about to speak—to give utterance to a thought that had long been topmost in her mind—but she hesitated, and when she made up her mind again the opportunity to speak was lost, for a faint tapping from without came upon their ears.

"That is some one returned," exclaimed Tom King, springing to his feet. "Remain here, Maud, and watch. I will soon bring you word who it is."

For greater safety, the entrance to the subterranean apartment was always secured on the inner side when occupied, so that no one could enter from without.

"Who is there?" asked Tom.

"Claude and myself," was the reply. "But where is the ostler? How is it there is no one on the watch?"

Tom opened the door, and then caught sight of the indistinct figures of his two comrades, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"Strange things have happened since you left," he said.

"You must attend to your horses yourselves."

"We have done so; but what has happened?"

"Nothing alarming. Come down."

The highwaymen obeyed, and the entrance was again secured.

Maud was standing near the inner doorway.

She had learned already from the voices that Dick had not returned.

Listening attentively, she heard Claude Duval say:

"Has the captain come back?"

"Not yet."

"Have you seen anything of him?" asked Maud, unable to repress the question.

"Nothing whatever. We did not expect to do so, as we have been in quite a different direction."

"He will not be here before to-morrow night," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for in a very short time it will be broad daylight. But what is it that has happened while we have been away?"

He entered the alchemist's chamber while he spoke, and Maud replied to his question merely by raising her finger and pointing to the sleeping form of the little child.

"Good Heaven!" ejaculated Jack, "where has that little stranger come from?"

"Speak quietly," said Tom, "or you will wake her. If you will give me your attention for a little while I will tell you all."

It was easy to see how deeply interested Claude and Jack were, and when Tom had recited the brief events of the night they broke out into loud execrations upon the mole's villany.

CHAPTER OMXCII.

DICK TURPIN TAKES LITTLE RUTH TO ST. JAMES'S PALACE,
AND MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE event proved that Sixteen-String Jack had spoken rightly when he said that Dick Turpin would not return before the following night.

The day was passed wretchedly by Maud, for her mind was filled with tormenting doubts and fears; but the companionship of Ruth and her innocent prattle prevented her from giving way to them so completely as she otherwise would have done.

But her anxiety was fully shared in by all three of the highwaymen, for they well knew how unusually fraught with danger his enterprise was.

As night approached, their uneasiness grew more marked, though, for Maud's sake, they strove to conceal it as well as they were able.

The hour of twelve had pealed forth from the church in the adjacent village when the listeners were aroused by a summons at the secret entrance.

"It is the captain!" all cried, but they were doomed to disappointment.

It was Jack the ostler, whose countenance wore an expression of unusual importance.

"Well," said Tom King, quickly, "have you been successful?"

"Yes, captain."

"You tracked the carriage?"

"Yes."

"To what place?"

"St. James's Palace."

The last words were echoed by all in tones of amazement.

"And did he enter there?"

"He did."

"And what else did you learn?"

"Nothing. I came straight back, thinking it best not to show myself."

"You were right—quite right! St. James's Palace. Then this little girl must be of higher rank than I took her to be."

"Why not question her?" said Claude. "No doubt she could give much information."

"I scarcely like to trouble her at present. Let her be until the captain's return; then, when we feel no anxiety

on his account, we can give all the more attention to what she has to say."

This was assented to, and by way of a change it was proposed that they should all make their way above ground, and keep a vigilant look-out.

But their patience was severely tested, for it was not until nearly dawn that they caught sight of the welcome form of their captain.

When they perceived him approaching—being to all appearances uninjured—they were inexpressibly relieved, for the long delay had filled them with a thousand apprehensions.

In the space of a few more moments he was surrounded with his faithful companions, and had Maud's head resting against his breast.

A dozen questions were asked him at once, but, holding up his hand, he said:

"Have patience for a little while, and I will tell you all."

Leaving the horses in charge of the ostler, and bidding him also to keep a sharp look-out, they made their way to the underground apartment.

The sight of the little girl was an intense surprise to Dick, which was just what his comrades intended it should be.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "a stranger. Where on earth has she come from?"

Maud would have answered him at once and fully, for her heart was full of indignation at what had taken place; but Claude interrupted her.

"We will hear your adventures first, if you please, captain. After that we will gratify your curiosity."

On this ground Maud was deeply interested, and we are justified in saying that she felt more curiosity and anxiety to hear the recital of the captain's adventures than either of his three comrades.

"I will gratify you," said Dick, "for though I have been away from you so long, I can describe what has taken place in a very few words."

With this he commenced; but he soon found the narrative took much longer in delivering than he had anticipated.

When he described his singular adventure with the gentleman who had given him the ring and mentioned St. James's Palace, his hearers exchanged glances, and wondered whether there would prove to be any connection between the two.

"And now, my friends," Dick said, "that is all. I have no more to tell. But do not keep me any longer in suspense about that little girl. Where did you find her?"

"I will tell you," said Tom King, who thereupon gave a very full description of the occurrences in the ruins on the preceding night.

"Never," said Dick, interrupting him, and speaking in a voice which well showed the state of his feelings—"never have I heard of a case of more atrocity. But go on—go on."

Tom complied.

While he was speaking, the young girl, who had awoke from her long sleep, stood beside Maud, listening with as much eagerness as anyone, though every now and then tears would spring into her eyes.

At last, when Tom concluded, Dick said:

"I cannot but commend you strongly for having preserved so much command over yourself. I question whether, under such circumstances, I should have been controlled by any considerations of safety."

"Perhaps I should not have been," answered Tom, "had I been in full possession of my health and vigor."

"At any rate, it is a most fortunate circumstance, for no one now knows anything about our being concealed here, and you have saved the child as well."

"Perhaps saved her more effectually than we could have done by an active interference."

"Very likely. But come here, little pet," said Dick, in a gentle voice, and drawing her towards him as he spoke. "Do not be afraid of me, but believe that I will be your friend, and never fear that any harm will come to you while I am by."

Ruth placed her hands in Dick Turpin's with the utmost confidence.

"But what think you of her uncle's rank?" whispered

Tom. "The ostler tracked him to St. James's Palace. Who can he be?"

"I can give no guess," answered Dick, glancing at the ring; "but I believe there is one within those walls who feels himself indebted to me on the score of gratitude. I fancy, too, that he possesses power there. At any rate, I will go to-night, and ask him to interest himself and use his influence in this little thing's behalf."

"But I have set myself the task of seeing her right," exclaimed Tom King, quickly.

"If you have, there are many reasons why you should pass the charge over to me. I have the means of gaining admittance to the palace, which you have not, and although you may feel better than you did, yet I think you are scarcely well and strong enough to undertake such an important matter."

Tom was silent, for he could not but admit the absolute truth and reason of these remarks.

"But," said Maud, timidly, "will it be safe to go? Will there not be a general look-out for you?"

"There may be, but I feel no apprehension as to the result. Besides, there is time for a good rest between now and nightfall, and it so happens that we have no business of any kind until to-morrow, when some one must go to receive old Matthew's letter on the bridge."

"Then I bespeak that duty!" cried Tom King. "I am tired to death of being imprisoned here. I can manage that easily."

"Agreed," said Dick—"that is, supposing that you find yourself sufficiently recovered of your wound."

"I shall be all right after a rest."

"I, too, feel much fatigued, yet, first of all, I should like to ask some questions of our little stranger here, if she would answer them."

Hearing this, Ruth looked up with wonder in her eyes. "I want you to tell us," said Dick, "who you are, and who your uncle is. I shall then be better able to judge what to do."

"My name is Ruth—Lady Ruth sometimes they call me."

"Lady Ruth what?"

"Comynge."

"And was your father known by that title?"

"Yes."

"And your uncle?"

"He is Lord Comynge now."

"And does he live at St. James's Palace?"

"Yes—that is where he is in attendance upon the King, which is nearly always."

"But how was it he brought you here?"

"I was at a party—this is the dress I wore. I was in the garden, and happened to be alone. Suddenly my uncle appeared, and told me he wanted me to go with him a little way—that my parents wished me to do so when I attained my seventh year."

"And you complied?"

"Oh yes. I thought no harm, though I had always greatly feared my uncle. I wanted to re-enter the house to put on my things, and tell them of my departure; but he said there was no necessity, as his carriage was waiting close by, and that he had already announced his intention of taking me away for an hour or so."

"Poor thing," said Dick, stroking her glossy hair. "I can easily understand how you would fall into such a well-laid trap as that. And so be brought you here to murder you?"

The child was silent.

"The mention of the name," interrupted Claude Duval, "reminds me that this place is, or used to be, called Comynge-Castle."

"Then if that is the case it will account for the villain bringing his niece here. I wonder, now, whether there is any truth in this tale about a secreted treasure?"

"I should think not, and yet there may be some foundation of truth in it. However, we can easily look in the morning and see."

"True; but at present I propose some rest, and, if I may judge by your looks, my proposal will be welcome enough received."

He was right.

All were, without exception, thoroughly worn out.

The care of the place was left entirely to Jack the ostler above, about whose fidelity not the shadow of a doubt was now entertained.

In a short time afterwards the profoundest stillness prevailed, and it was not until just as evening was approaching that the highwaymen reassembled.

Claude and Jack had made known the pecuniary result of their last expedition, and as the amount was not sufficient for their purpose it was agreed that they should take another turn upon the highway while Dick repaired to St. James's Palace.

He had little doubt that if he merely declared his story, and left the little girl in charge of the stranger he had befriended, she would be well taken care of in the future, and her villainous uncle punished.

At any rate, this was what he hoped.

As the time drew near for the little girl to take her departure, Maud wept plentifully, for short as had been the time of their acquaintance, yet she had learned to love this little girl with no common affection.

As for little Lady Ruth herself, she fully reciprocated this feeling, and also wept at the prospect of separation. Not only was she extremely fond of Maud, but the novelty of her situation charmed and delighted her.

Dick only waited until it was perfectly dark.

In spite of her hard gallop on the previous night, he found Black Bess in capital condition for the road.

Tom King looked with an eye of envy upon the preparations for departure, and almost felt inclined to join them; but Maud's earnest entreaties for him to remain and bear her company, as well as sundry sharp twinges which his arm gave him now and then, induced him to overcome this inclination.

Dick took his departure first.

The ostler had given him the word that the coast was perfectly clear, so he sprang into the saddle and then had the little girl seated in front of him.

"Expect me before daybreak," he cried, as he allowed the reins to fall upon the back of Black Bess; "but if I do not return by then on no account set out to meet me."

The little girl was for some moments terrified at her situation, which appeared to her to be full of danger.

Perceiving this, Dick hastened to reassure her, and in a few moments succeeded in dispelling her fears.

On his way Dick glanced continually about him, for he fully expected to meet with the officers before going far. He was tolerably certain that such a commotion as he had raised on the two preceding nights would not die out very readily.

The little girl noticed his perpetual vigilance, but never once guessed the cause, for they had all been most cautious to keep their occupation a secret.

To Dick's agreeable surprise the journey to London was performed without any accident; but when he drew near to St. James's Palace he began to wonder in what manner he could dispose of his mare.

After the result of placing her in the stable in Piccadilly he was scarcely likely to attempt that mode of disposal again; but the question arose of what else he could do.

He came in sight of the dull, dingy-looking palace without having come to a decision.

"It will not do to hesitate or loiter," he muttered.

"Such a course would inevitably give rise to suspicion. I have a good mind to ride boldly beneath the gateway, and give one of the palace lackeys the job of holding her."

This was an idea that probably would have occurred to no one else but Dick Turpin.

Yet the more he considered it, the more he liked it, and so he continued to ride on at his former easy pace.

As usual, a sentinel stood at the entrance of the courtyard.

Hearing the sound of an approaching horse's hoofs, he looked up.

By the aid of the dark, flickering oil lamp suspended above him, and which was the best exterior illumination the palace afforded, he made out the form of our hero.

Dick rode on without bestowing any notice upon him.

Finding himself treated in this unceremonious manner, the sentry allowed Dick to pass without questioning; but had Dick shown any hesitation, admittance would doubtless have been denied to him.

Ere going far, however, Turpin encountered another soldier on guard, and this one was more particular.

"Your business?" he said, briefly.

"Be good enough to look at this ring."

He extended his hand as he spoke.

The sentry made as good an examination as the darkness permitted: but it seemed a satisfactory one, for he said:

"All right—pass on! Knock at the fourth door and come on to your left hand."

"Does your beat extend so far?"

"Yes—just beyond, sir. Why?"

"Because, if you like, I will leave you in charge of my mare. She will be no trouble whatever, as she will stand quietly enough by the door if she is not interfered with; and as you go by, if you will just keep an eye upon her, that is as much as will be required."

"All right, sir."

Dick rode on till he reached the door mentioned by the guard.

Then dismounting, he assisted the little girl to her feet. "Woa, Bess," he said, in a low voice—"steady, lass! Wait here till I come back."

Having thus spoken, he knocked loudly at the door, raising a thousand echoes in the silent courtyard.

His summons met with a speedy response.

Without waiting to say or hear a word, Dick coolly crossed the threshold.

"Who are you, sir?" said a man, clad in the costume of a yeoman of the guard. "What do you want?"

Dick held out his hand.

"Just look at that ring, will you?"

"All right, sir," said the man, respectfully, after a hasty glance—"pass on. Ascend the stairs. At the top you will be challenged again."

The little girl walked by Turpin's side with the air of one who had long been accustomed to tread beneath that royal roof. Indeed, if Dick had thought of applying to her, she would have made an excellent guard.

Sure enough at the top of the stairs they were stopped again—this time by a man who was not attired in any uniform whatever.

Having looked at the ring, he gazed upon Turpin with no little surprise and curiosity.

"You cannot see him to-night," said this plainly-attired individual.

Dick was strongly inclined to ask, "See who?" for he had not the least idea to whom the ring belonged. But the manifest impolicy of saying anything of the kind made him silent.

In a moment after he replied in a very different manner.

"I must!" he said, curtly.

"Impossible!"

"But I say I must; and if not now, I will wait till I can!"

"If your business is urgent you can confide it to me."

Dick shook his head resolutely.

"Then you can just go back the way that you came; and the next time, if you do not choose to tell me your business, you will have a great deal of difficulty in getting this far, let me tell you!"

"What's that, eh—eh—what's that?" said a voice.

A door was opened hastily, and some one stepped forward with a hurried, undignified, ungraceful step.

The gentleman in the plain suit no sooner heard this voice than he uttered an ejaculation of dismay, and seemed ready to fall flat to the floor.

He faced round, however, and began to mutter some excuses.

Dick looked up, and at once recognised the stranger he had befriended.

His countenance showed the marks of the injuries he had received.

"Your Royal Highness—" gasped the gentleman in black.

The words filled Dick with amazement.

At the same time he felt the little girl tugging at his hand, and looked down to ascertain the cause of her delay.

"It's the Prince of Wales," she said, in a whisper. "Be careful what you say and do, for he has got an awful temper."

CHAPTER CMXIII.

FOLLOWS THE ADVENTURES OF DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS.

THE way in which little Ruth spoke would at any other time have brought a smile to Dick Turpin's lips.

But on the present occasion such an expression of feeling was altogether impolitic and not to be thought of.

It was not possible, however, for Dick all in a moment to overget the astonishment that was produced by the discovery that the person he had saved from such imminent danger, and whose behavior seemed so eccentric, was no less a personage than his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and grandson of the King.

But much of the eccentricity of his behavior was now accounted for.

He was not allowed any further time for thought, however, for the prince said:

"Cameron!"

"Ye—ye—yes, your Royal Highness!" stammered the man.

"Be off, and don't attempt to pry into my private affairs again."

"But, your Royal High—"

"Be off, I say!"

Warned probably by the tone of the prince's voice that it would be unwise to exasperate him any further, Cameron beat a retreat.

"And now, sir," said the prince, addressing himself to Dick, "may I ask your business with me?"

Once again by way of reply Dick simply held out his hand.

"What, is it you?" said the prince, in accents of surprise. "Well, well—never mind. But you must be something more than a man, that is all I can say."

"Nay, your Royal Highness, you requested me to call!"

"I did—I did; yet never thought that you would be foolhardy enough to do so."

"I am here."

"I see you are. Follow me into this room, where we can converse in private."

The prince led the way back into the room from which he had so unexpectedly emerged.

"Shut the door and sit down," said the prince, as he flung himself into a luxurious easy chair. "I don't want to play the prince just now—bah! I am sick of it."

Dick complied with the greatest readiness.

"I told you," began the prince, "that if you liked to call here some night you would hear something to your advantage."

"Your Royal Highness was good enough to say so, but believe me, I had not then the remotest idea of who you were."

"I believe not; but I expected you would come alone. What little girl is that you have with you?"

"Does not your Royal Highness recognise her?"

The prince stretched his little sleepy-looking eyes as wide open as his fat cheeks would let him, then said, slowly:

"I fancy I have seen her before."

"Your Royal Highness, this is the Lady Ruth Comynge."

"Comynge?" repeated the prince, while a black, portentous-looking frown almost hid his eyes altogether.

"Yes; and if your Royal Highness will only be kind enough to listen to what I have to relate you will at once take this poor child's part."

"I don't know that!" muttered the prince.

This was by no means encouraging—moreover, Dick was considerably puzzled.

Nevertheless, he steadily began his narrative, relating everything in connection with the little girl. He proceeded at some length, for the prince listened with avidity, but what was strangest of all, with evident gratification.

Dick trusted ere long to be able to solve all these mysteries.

When he had brought his narrative to a conclusion the prince said:

"This is the second service you have rendered me."

"Second service?" ejaculated Dick, amazed. "How so?"

"In this way: This girl's uncle, Comynge, is the King's confidant. He has his ear in everything, and, what is

more, he is my bitter foe. Yee," said the prince, spitefully, "I hate him! He is ever prying into my private affairs, and poisoning the King's mind against me. I won't fall in with his views, and so, you see, he is determined that I shall be disgraced."

Dick nodded.

"But now," cried the prince, springing to his feet, and pacing the room in exultation, "I have him in my power—completely in my power! I will crush him!"

The prince clenched his hands tightly as he spoke, and the expression on his countenance was one of unmitigated hatred.

"Your Royal Highness," said Dick, also rising to his feet.

"Well?"

"Excuse me a moment."

So saying, Dick pointed to the door, towards which he strode rapidly.

The thick, soft carpet beneath his feet prevented the least noise.

By his movements, the prince comprehended that Dick suspected that some one was listening at the door, and so he looked on with great suspense and curiosity to see what the highwayman was about to do.

Dick carefully took hold of the knob.

Turning it quickly, he opened the door about a couple of feet.

Then, with equal quickness, closed it again.

But there was a sudden, sharp crack audible, so, in the most natural manner possible, Dick opened the door to see what was the matter.

On his knees on the mat, and rubbing his forehead with a very rueful air, was Cameron, the prince's valet.

"Dear me!" said Dick, pretending to be greatly concerned. "I had no idea you were there! I hope you are not hurt, sir?"

Cameron took no further notice of this speech than to mutter some curses under his voice.

Then he struggled to his feet, and retired, looking completely crestfallen.

"Serves him right!" said the prince, laughing heartily.

Dick closed the door again, and resumed his seat.

"You understand now," said the prince, after a pause of a few minutes' duration—"you understand now in what manner you have contrived to render me this second service. My enemy will now be effectually removed. Leave Lady Ruth to me, and I will see not only that her unnatural kinsman is duly punished, but that she shall be fully restored to the rights he would have deprived her of."

"The word of your Royal Highness is quite sufficient," said Dick, with much deference, "and I trust you will accept my thanks, though I feel myself unable to express them."

"Enough!" said the prince. "I feel myself under a deep debt of obligation to you, and, in spite of what you are, I cannot forget—besides, I have a still further call to make upon your services."

"Your Highness, you will always find me ready and willing."

"I do not doubt it. I cannot unfold my plans to you to-night, however. Come to me again, and I will be prepared. I require a secret agent in an affair of much importance."

Dick bowed to intimate his perfect readiness.

"Come, Lady Ruth," said the prince, taking her by the hand, "I will be answerable for your safety."

"Your Royal Highness," said Dick, "I take my leave, but if—"

"If what? Say on!"

"If your Highness would reward me so far as to give me a safe conduct from the palace. I have only made my way here at a great risk, and I am fearful that on my return I may be intercepted by my enemies."

Dick, as he spoke, walked to one of the windows in the room, and drew aside the heavy curtain with which it was covered.

Placing his face close to the glass, he peeped out, and found that he commanded a view of the courtyard.

At some distance off he could perceive Black Bess standing as still as any statue.

"All seems well!" he exclaimed, turning back into the

apartment. "I fancy there will be no need of your Royal Highness's interference."

"So much the better then, for I wish our dealings to be kept as secret as possible. Go, and have no fear; I will watch at this window until you take your departure."

Dick could not depart without saying farewell to little Lady Ruth.

The child wept, for, young as she was, yet she was conscious that she was parting with a well-tried friend.

"I shall never forget you—never!" she cried, through her tears, as Dick Turpin left the apartment.

The highwayman had taken particular notice of the different corridors he had passed through and the various staircases he had ascended, so he was able to find his way to the little door by which he had entered with as much precision as any inhabitant of the place.

The yeoman of the guard who had admitted him opened the door and allowed him to pass out.

The next moment he was standing beside Black Bess.

But just as he was about to place his foot in the stirrup, a man sprang out of the darkness and seized him by the throat.

"Dick Turpin," he said, "you are my prisoner. Surrender quietly, for you cannot escape! The courtyard is full of my men!"

Dick shook off his grasp, and spoke in indignant tones:

"I am not in the humor to be jested with! Stand aside! What do you mean?"

Dick's perfect coolness staggered the officer.

"Surely," he ejaculated—"surely you don't go for to deny your identity?"

"You are drunk, I think."

"No; but you are Dick Turpin, and at all hazards I will make you my prisoner."

"Then you are a fool, and will suffer for your pains! Stand off, I say!"

"If you are not Dick Turpin, who are you then?"

"What business is that of yours?"

The officer placed a whistle to his lips, and blew it shrilly.

"You will get yourself into trouble, you wrong-headed fool!" said Dick. "I am a friend of the Prince of Wales's, and am even now about to set forth on his business."

"How jolly green you must think me! It won't do, Dick, for you won't impose upon me by such a tale."

Dick played his part very well, but to no effect, and he now looked up with some anxiety at the window at which the prince had promised to station himself.

He was wondering how far the prince would feel inclined to compromise himself on his behalf.

But surely if there was any such thing as gratitude existing, the Prince would interfere.

The officers now clustered around Dick in a dense throng.

He began to grow anxious.

His sole hope rested with the prince.

If he failed to keep his word he was lost indeed.

"Are you coming quietly, Dick?" said the officer. "If not, we can easily overpower you by force."

"Hark—behold!"

At this moment, with a clashing sound, one of the upper casements was thrown open.

"R—low, there! Guard—guard!"

There was an immediate stir and bustle, and then from out of a low doorway there issued several soldiers.

"Halt!" said the officer.

The soldiers came to a standstill.

"Give that gentleman safe escort from the palace. He is engaged on my private business."

The voice of the prince was well known.

Indeed, there was something so peculiar in its tone that once heard it was never forgotten.

"Yes, your Royal Highness," replied the officer in command of the soldiers.

The casement was closed again.

The police officer who was so certain of capturing Dick Turpin knew the prince's voice full well, so he shrank back.

"Be careful how you interfere another time," said Dick, "or his Highness will have you removed from your post."

With these words the highwayman, escorted by the small troop of soldiers, quickly trotted out of the palace yard.

When once in the open street he felt that he was quite safe.

But he made up his mind to get out of the vicinity of the palace with all speed.

Accordingly he loosened the reins upon the back of Black Bess, and the next moment he was galloping up St. James's Street at a pace that raised a prodigious clatter.

"Home now," Dick muttered, as, having reached Piccadilly, he turned his mare's head westward—"home now. I ought to be well satisfied with all that I have accomplished to-night."

This was certainly right; but before he had gone very far Dick found that he was troubled with a most tormenting thirst.

"I should not have raised an objection if the prince had offered me a glass of wine," he murmured, with a smile. "However, at the next inn I come to I will pull up for a moment and have a good draught of ale."

Being in England, Dick had not to travel far without finding what he sought.

In fact, in rather less than five minutes afterwards he caught sight of one of those pretty roadside inns which were more plentiful along the lines of the different highways than they are now.

The place looked quiet enough in all conscience, and Dick at any rate ran whatever risk there was in stopping.

He pulled up in front of the long horse trough, from which he allowed Black Bess to drink, but only sparingly.

"Hilloa!" he shouted. "House—house! Landlord—ostler!"

These outcries brought to the front door of the inn a young and rather good-looking girl, and to the yard gate a thin, wiry little man, evidently the ostler.

"A tankard of your very best old October ale, my dear!" said Turpin, to the girl. "Make haste, for I am very thirsty, and if the ale is as good as you are beautiful, it will be very welcome, I assure you!"

The girl was by no means insensible to a compliment, so she smiled quite pleasantly upon the highwayman, and ran back into the house.

"A little hay," added Dick, to the ostler—"just a handful, that's all."

At this moment the blind hanging over one of the windows was drawn aside, and a man peered out.

One of the upper panes of this window was broken, and through this the sound of voices came with tolerable distinctness.

"All right," said some one—"I can see her. She is quiet enough; but I would not sell her for a thousand!"

Dick looked about him, wondering to what these words could apply.

His state of doubt did not continue long, for he caught sight of a very handsome bright bay horse, that was secured by the rein to a ring that was fixed in the wall near the window from which the man had looked out.

"It's a beauty," he muttered, admiringly—"a real beauty! She could almost rival my own bonny Black Bess."

The horse upon which Dick gazed was in good truth a splendid creature, and it is very probable his admiration would have gone still further, but just at this moment the young girl appeared, carrying the tankard.

Dick took it from her with a glance and manner that brought the color to her cheeks.

The ale was of good quality, and Dick was very thirsty, both of which occurrences combined caused the liquid to disappear with great rapidity.

When he paused to take breath, the ostler came with the hay.

A few unimportant words were exchanged, and then, when just about to ride off, Dick slipped a crown-piece into the palm of the ostler, and gave the girl another, bidding her get change and give it him the next time he called.

At a gentle trot, Dick now set forward, for he believed that he was at present quite out of danger, and as there

was no occasion to hurry himself, he thought he might as well ride to the castle quietly as not.

But just at the moment when he took his departure from the inn, a gentleman came out of the front door.

"Now, ostler," he cried, "bring my nag this way!"

"Are you off now, sir?"

"Yes; be quick."

"All right, sir."

The gentleman glanced along the road, and caught sight of Dick mounted on Black Bess.

They had indeed only got a few yards away.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, in a voice of enthusiasm, "what a splendid creature! What a magnificent trot, to be sure!"

As he pronounced the words several other persons sallied forth from the inn.

They were idlers, every one of them, and only came in order to witness the traveller ride off, for he had been vamping for at least an hour about the qualities of his steed—so much so that the curiosity of all was strongly excited.

Upon hearing the remark made by the traveller, the ostler said:

"Mayhap, sir, you don't know who that is?"

"I certainly do not. Do you?"

"Yes, very well," returned the ostler, with a peculiar smile.

"Well, who is he? I should like to know him on account of his horse. I would ride any distance to see a bit of choice horseflesh."

The gentleman was evidently an enthusiast in the matter of horses.

"I'll tell you if you like," said the ostler.

"Well, who is he?"

"You have heard of Dick Turpin?"

"Of course I have."

"Well, that's him."

The ostler pointed down the road as he uttered these emphatic words.

"Impossible!"

"It is not impossible at all, sir! I know him!"

"Then, you rascal, why didn't you raise an immediate outcry, and try to capture him?"

"What for?"

"What for? Because he is a highwayman!"

"He never robbed me of nothin'."

"That may be."

"Nor I never saw him rob nobody else."

"That's not to the point. If you knew it was Dick Turpin, your duty was to raise the alarm immediately."

"Oh, was it? Very well, I shall know what to do when I see him again."

Evidently the ostler was not inclined to regard Dick in an unfriendly light.

The gentleman gazed after the retreating forms of the highwayman and his steed—both of them now nearly out of sight—with feelings very different to those he had lately looked at them with.

"Why not pursue him now?" said the gentleman, turning to the throng of idlers near the inn door. "We might keep on his track till we met with assistance."

The ostler laughed.

"What are you grinning at, you great idiot?" said the gentleman, angrily.

"Why, at you, for thinking of such a thing. Why, you might as well gallop over a marsh after a will-o'-the-wisp as after Black Bess when Dick Turpin was on her back—you would have about as good a chance of capturing one as the other."

"You are evidently in collusion with this robber," said the gentleman, hotly, "so I should advise you to be very careful what you say and do."

"Collusion?" repeated the ostler slowly, and scratching his head while he spoke. "And what may that mean?"

"Oh, confound you, don't bother. I'll ride off after this Dick Turpin myself."

"Then you're mad, sir," said the landlord, coming forward.

"Are you a confederate too?" asked the gentleman, with a sneer.

"No, I am not; but every man must be mad who would heedlessly ride to his death."



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.]

"Bah! I have no patience with you at all! You seem to be frightened to death at the fellow's name! He is but a man, I tell you, and as such I will be a match for him, as my nag here will be for his mare!"

"Dick Turpin's match has not been found yet," muttered the ostler, "and that is why he remains at liberty. Plenty have pitted themselves against him, but they have always failed."

"No matter!" said the stranger, as he sprang into the saddle. "I know it would be worse than useless to ask any of you to accompany me, so I shall start alone. But don't be surprised to see me come back with my prisoner all safe!"

"I shall!" the ostler was heard to mutter, under his voice, as he turned aside; and he was further heard to say, more indistinctly, something about a wilful man having his own way.

The gentleman took not the slightest notice of him, No. 207.—BLACK BESS.

however, but, giving a patronising nod by way of farewell to those who stood at the inn door, he rode away at a pace that was indeed wonderful.

The horse he bestrode was in good truth a wonderful creature, and justified him to a very great extent in boasting about it as he did.

"If he goes on long at that rate," said the landlord, "he will not be long in overtaking Dick Turpin, I'm thinking."

"That depends whether he lets Black Bess have her head or not," replied the ostler.

The gentleman evidently thought he should quickly overtake Dick, and therefore pushed his horse to the utmost of his capacity.

He was quite right in this, but the event was brought about in a manner he had not for a moment expected, and which, consequently, took him greatly by surprise.

Hearing some one coming along the road at such a

fearful rate, Dick Turpin, so far from urging Bess onward, pulled her up altogether.

Then, turning her head in the opposite direction, he planted her in the middle of the road, and there waited quietly to see who was approaching.

CHAPTER CMXCIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS UNEXPECTEDLY WITH A NOVEL AND PROFITABLE ADVENTURE.

THIS manœuvre on Dick's part quite disconcerted his pursuer, and by slow degrees he reined-in his steed, until its pace was reduced to a slow walk.

The gentleman really thought that Dick would be afraid of anyone who had courage enough to face him boldly; but the highwayman's behavior quickly dispelled this very erroneous idea.

Had there been any satisfactory way of doing so, the gentleman would unquestionably have turned back again; but he could not do so without passing the inn, and he was one who, above all things, hated to be laughed at, so he held on his way, filled with hesitation and wondering what he should do.

It was not, either, without a great deal of trepidation that he thus rode forward, for he had heard many strange stories of Dick Turpin and his doings, and consequently he was rather nervous as to what fate he might have in store for him.

His horse walked on until it reached the spot where Black Bess was standing.

Dick recognised the horse, and it may be he partially comprehended what was the gentleman's intention.

He took off his hat, and made a very elaborate bow.

"Good evening, sir!" he said, with the utmost politeness. "I feel much pleasure in meeting with you."

The gentleman had not yet recovered his self-possession, nor had he made up his mind as to just what he should do, so in his confusion he returned Dick's salutation with a great deal of ceremony.

"That is a splendid nag you have, sir," remarked Dick.

This seemed to put the gentleman more at his ease, for he replied:

"You say rightly, sir. His equal has yet to be found. I have never met him, and I don't believe ever shall."

"Indeed! Then he must be of rare quality?"

"He is—he is. I have heard much about a mare called Black Bess, and have been told wonderful stories of her powers; but I should not be afraid to match mine against even her."

"Wouldn't you indeed?"

"I really should not."

"Now supposing, sir, you had the opportunity of taking a trial race with this Black Bess, what odds would you take?"

"Any."

In his excitement and enthusiasm about his horse, the gentleman was ready to forget anything.

But most especially did he congratulate himself upon the turn the conversation had taken, since it would enable him to escape an encounter with the redoubtable highwayman without any disagreeable imputations upon his own courage.

"You speak boldly," said Dick, after a brief pause.

"I mean what I say."

"That is, if you had the chance of trying the speed of your horse against Black Bess, you would be ready to bet any amount that your horse would win? Well, then, sir, you can have your inclination gratified, provided you don't change your mind."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, in deed and in truth, too. For, hark ye, sir, a word in your ear—"

"Well—well?"

"I am Dick Turpin, at your service, and this is Black Bess, at your service too."

It was on the tip of the stranger's tongue to say:

"I know that very well!"

But he restrained himself, and merely repeated the word:

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir," said Dick; "and if you don't mind making

it worth my while, why, you shall have the trial race you so much wish for."

"Make it worth your while? How?"

"Why, as I am sure to win—"

The traveller interrupted him with a laugh.

Dick repeated his words.

"As I am sure to win, you must make something like a tolerable bet, otherwise I should not think of putting my mare and myself to so much trouble."

"Upon my word you take it coolly."

"Always did. But come, sir, time is passing. Is your inclination unaltered?"

"Quite."

"Then what is the figure? How much have you about you—I mean in the shape of ready money, rings, jewels, and other valuables?"

The traveller stared at this cool question, and asked:

"Do you think I shall tell you?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Why, I suppose that would only be preliminary to asking me to hand them over to you, and I have heard so much of your courage and prowess that I don't know whether I should feel inclined to run the risk of a personal conflict with you."

Dick bowed to this compliment.

"If you have heard much about me," he said, "you will unquestionably have been told that one of my characteristics is that whenever I pass my word I never go back from it."

"I have heard something of it."

"Then on the present occasion I give you my word that, if you will answer the question I asked you, I will not make the slightest attempt to take what you have from you."

"Then why do you want to know?"

"Answer my question first. Do not be afraid to do so."

"Well, then," said the gentleman, "I should think that, taking the ready money I have about me, and placing a fair value on my ornaments, there may be somewhere about six hundred pounds."

"Indeed, sir, I am glad to hear it."

"May I ask why?"

"Yes—because, now there is a chance of our race to come off."

"Be good enough to explain yourself."

"Certainly—nothing is easier. As you may be aware there is a reward of one thousand pounds to be gained by whoever captures me and takes me to Newgate."

"I believe it is so."

"It is a fact, I can assure you, and that being understood, I will proceed to give you a form of the wager."

"I am all attention."

"Well, then, we are now on a capital bit of roadway—about the best in England, I should think, and we are by no means likely to meet with anyone at this late hour, so I propose that we adopt it for our race."

"Agreed!"

"Then as to the distance. Let me see, Ealing is the village next on before us. How far should you reckon it to be?"

"Rather better than seven miles, I should think."

"You are about right. We will call it seven miles, and we will let the Horns at Ealing be our goal."

"You mean the little inn on the left-hand side of the road?"

"Yes; and whoever reaches there first shall be the winner of the race."

"Agreed—that is fair enough."

"And now, sir, for the wager itself. If I get to the inn first you will, without any demur or resistance whatever, hand over everything in the shape of valuables you possess—on the other hand, should you get there first, I will, when I arrive, surrender myself to you in an instant, and you can then gain the thousand pounds reward offered for my apprehension."

The gentleman had the utmost faith in the capacity of his steed, and upon hearing the highwayman make this proposition his eyes glittered with cupidity.

"And you are willing and content to abide by that?"

"Perfectly."

"Then give me your word."

"I give you my word, which has never once been broken."

"Enough."

"You clearly understand, and unhesitatingly agree to the terms?"

"I do."

"Then no more need be said. Let us be off at once. I am ready whenever you are."

Dick's confidence made the stranger somewhat uneasy; but he strove to calm his mind by thinking that it was more braggadocio on Dick's part than aught else.

"How shall we arrange to start at the same moment?"

"Easily. You see the moon yonder? It is just emerging from behind that dark cloud. When it perfectly breaks forth make your start."

"Agreed!" said the stranger again.

He slightly shifted his position as he spoke, so as to be just abreast of the highwayman.

They had not to wait long before making the start.

The moon came completely out from behind the cloud which had for so long obscured her radiance.

The very instant that the whole of her silvery disc was exposed, the stranger cried:

"Off now and away!"

At the same moment he gave his horse so vicious a dig with the spurs that the animal cleared a tremendous distance at one bound, and then went tearing along at a speed which could only be characterised as terrific.

But Dick adopted no such violent means.

Simply dropping the reins upon the neck of Black Bess as he was in the habit of doing, he cried:

"Now, old lass—forward—forward! Let us see what you can do to-night! I have staked my life on your powers, old girl—don't forget that! Forward, now—forward! That is it!"

It was truly beautiful now to see the manner in which Black Bess covered the ground.

Her gallop just resembled that of the greyhound—being composed of long, swinging, graceful bounds.

But the horse upon which the stranger so prided himself was of no every-day kind.

The start that it gained at the first it preserved well, and Dick found before he had gone far that Black Bess would have to tax herself to the utmost to beat him.

The stranger pressed his hat tightly on his head, and from time to time looked back behind him with the greatest exultation.

But Dick took it very easy, making no further effort to increase his mare's speed—in fact, he had hit upon a capital mode of proceeding.

About her competency to outstrip the horse in front he had not the least doubt. He had tried her too often for that. It is true he recollected how well Sir George's horse had kept behind him on a former occasion; but then Black Bess was wounded and weak from loss of blood, while now she was in the best possible condition.

Going at the furious pace they did, it was not long before Ealing came into view.

At this time the two horsemen were almost level with each other.

But there was this difference to be noted between them.

The stranger was spurring his horse at every step, and making the most frantic efforts to urge him onwards at a more rapid rate.

Dick, on the contrary, was sitting quite at ease, letting Black Bess have all her own way.

It was not until within a quarter of a mile from Ealing that he made the least effort.

Then all he did was to say:

"Sir, you have lost your race."

That was all that reached the stranger. Years, for at the very moment that he pronounced the words Dick slackened the reins still more, and gave utterance to that strange sound so well comprehended by Black Bess, and which meant that she was to put forth her very utmost powers.

She responded right gallantly, for she dashed past the bay horse like an arrow, and at each stroke of her hoofs the distance could be seen to increase between them.

Although he must have seen that it was totally impossible for his horse to win, the stranger was so exasperated at his defeat that he continued to goad the poor creature in a most fearful manner,

Dick drew up with some suddenness in front of the Horns.

"Bravo, Bess!" he cried, exultantly. "I knew you would not fail me. Bravo, old lass, you have behaved yourself right gallantly and well! Ah, here he comes!"

These words were called forth by the clatter of hoofs, for the stranger came thundering along like a whirlwind.

He pulled up, however, a moment after in front of the inn, where Dick was waiting for him so calmly.

The stranger's horse was covered from head to foot with white foam, and now that it had been brought to a standstill it trembled in every limb.

Black Bess, on the other hand, though breathing rapidly, showed no other sign of distress. Her flanks were a little wet, but nothing more.

"I told you you would lose," said Dick; "but I hope you are satisfied that all was quite fair?"

The stranger was silent.

"Don't be disappointed, man," cried Dick. "It is no disgrace to your horse that he has been outrun by Black Bess. When I staked my life you might have guessed what would have been the result. Don't think any the less of your horse either for this defeat, for I question much whether there is another that could have done to-night what he has done."

"He is beaten," said the stranger, "that is enough. He has now lost all value in my eyes."

"Nay—say not so."

"I do say it, because I prided myself upon possessing the fleetest horse in England."

"And I repeat that it is no depreciation to him that he has been outrun by Black Bess."

But the traveller would not look at it in this light.

Attracted by the noise made by their arrival, several persons sallied forth from the inn, which was only waiting for the stage-coach to pass by to be closed for the night.

Among these were the landlord and ostler.

The latter came close to Dick, who beckoned him to approach still nearer.

Then, in a low voice, he said:

"Be quick. I want you to bring me a quart of brandy—the best, mind—in a stable bucket."

The ostler opened his eyes in amazement.

"A quart of brandy in a bucket?" he ejaculated.

"Yes—make haste! The sooner you are back the sooner you will see what I intend to do with it."

Struck probably by the force of this remark, the ostler hurried away.

"Now, sir," said Dick, addressing himself to the stranger, "let us settle our little affair before we go any further. I cannot spare any more time, I assure you."

For his honor's sake, the stranger could not refuse compliance with this request.

But, nevertheless, it was with the very worst possible grace in the world that he thrust his hand into his pockets and produced—first a purse, then a pocket-book, then a watch, and lastly some rings from his fingers, and jewellery from various parts of his apparel.

This operation occupied some little time, however, and while he was thus engaged the ostler made his appearance, carrying a bucket in one hand and a quart measure in the other.

"You are sure you want the brandy in this here bucket?"

"Yes—pour it in. Be quick, and then fill it up with water."

The ostler obeyed, indulging the while in vague speculations as to whether the gentleman was going to drink a bucketful of brandy and water for a wager.

"Here it is, sir," he said, as soon as he had added the water.

"Just give it my mare, then."

The ostler's astonishment reached its culminating point.

Brandy-and-water to a horse! He had never heard of such a thing.

But Black Bess, knowing full well that the compound was intended for her, began drinking away at it at a rate that left no room for doubting whether she liked it or not.

It was just as Black Bess drained the last drop, that the stranger said:

"There, then, is all I have. I have kept my word to you, have I not?"

"You have, indeed. Here, take this five-pound note back again—it will do to pay the toll-gates. Now what will you take to drink at my expense?"

"Nothing."

The tone in which the traveller pronounced this one word showed what an amount of aggravation he felt.

"Come—come, sir," Dick cried, "think no more of your defeat."

"I have kept my word to the letter," said the stranger, raising his voice so that all around might hear what he said; "but having done so, I call upon these good people for assistance!"

"Assistance?" Dick echoed, while he tightened his grasp upon the reins.

"Yes. Although I promised to surrender to you all I had, I did not undertake that I would keep your identity a secret."

"But it would be base to disclose it!"

Dick backed his mare as he spoke, for the people were clustering around him by far too closely to be pleasant.

"Base or not, I don't care!" shouted the traveller, now quite beside himself with vexation. "Good people all, this is Dick Turpin, the celebrated highwayman, for whose apprehension a thousand pounds reward is offered! Help me to secure the rascal!"

This announcement was productive of an immense commotion.

"My blunderbuss," cried the landlord—"where is my blunderbuss? I will blow him to atoms!"

"Will you help me?" roared the traveller.

"Yes, yes," was the unanimous cry.

"Then, gentlemen," said Dick, "I can only say you will have a long and fatiguing run. I have the honor to wish you all a very good night."

So saying, Dick slackened the reins upon the neck of Black Bess.

As usual, the gallant creature perfectly well understood what was required of her.

Before the landlord and the others in front of the inn could quite make up their minds where to turn and what to do Dick Turpin was full half a mile off down the road, and going at a pace that soon promised to take him out of sight.

Muttering curses, the discomfited stranger rode off in pursuit, though the exhausted condition of his steed showed how perfectly ridiculous it was for him to attempt a pursuit.

But the traveller just then was not in a condition to think very clearly or reason very correctly about anything, and so, with his breast full of angry feelings, he pushed on, trusting in the end either to overtake the highwayman, or else meet with officers or others whom he could set upon his track.

CHAPTER CXXV.

TOM KING IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS ATTEMPT TO TAKE POSSESSION OF OLD MATTHEW'S LETTER.

"EASY—easy, Bess—take it easy, old lass! There is no need for you to exert yourself now. You have behaved yourself bravely, old girl! By Jove, who would have thought that such an odd, unlooked-for adventure should have turned out so profitably? I am possessed of six hundred pounds in value, at the very lowest estimate. Of that I am quite certain. Well, well, it could not have dropped into my hands at a better time. I have a use for every penny of it."

He was thinking of Tom Davis.

"If old Matthew's plan can only be carried out," he said, half aloud, as Black Bess went slowly on her way, "it will be a glorious thing, and for my part I can see no reason why it should not. I should feel, then, that I had done my duty to one who has ever been a faithful ally."

The hour now was very late—or, more strictly speaking, very early. There was little probability of meeting with anyone upon the road, and so Dick made his mind up to ride direct to the castle.

Accordingly he left the high-road and struck off across the open country, thus unknowingly completely dis-

appointing the traveller in his hope of getting upon his track.

Upon Dick's arrival at the ruins the ostler at once came forward.

"You are back soon to-night, captain," he said.

"Yes," replied Dick. "The others have not returned, I suppose?"

"Not yet, captain."

Dick dismounted and gave Black Bess into the charge of the ostler, who at once took her off to her accustomed place in the ruins.

Maud had heard Dick's arrival, and hastened forward to meet him.

"Well," said Tom King, as soon as Dick entered the subterranean apartment, "have you been successful in finding a friend for the little girl? You do not know how much I regret parting with her. She had quite won my heart!"

"I believe," answered Dick, "that I have left her in the hands of one who is better able to befriend her than almost anyone."

"But will he?"

"Well, little Ruth's uncle is his personal enemy, and he has suffered much at his hands. However, I can see by both of your looks how interested you are, so I will give you an account of every incident that has befallen me."

"A rare night's sport!" said Tom King, as soon as the narrative was concluded. "I wish I could only be fortunate enough to meet with such a one. I feel to be growing absolutely rusty!"

"How is your arm?"

"Better—much better. In fact, I feel nothing of it worth mentioning. It is getting well as fast as it can, and I shall be all the better for a little exercise."

"You still think of looking for old Matthew's letter?"

"If you have no objection, captain."

"Well, to speak truth, I had quite made up my mind to look after that bit of business; but as you seem to desire it you shall go."

Maud heard these words with manifold pleasure, though she said nothing.

Morning came, bright, clear, and beautiful; but it did not bring either Sixteen-String Jack or Claude Duval.

Their non-appearance excited but little apprehension in the breasts of those who watched for them.

They had to endure suspense as to the safety of their comrades; but it was better for them to do that than for the security of their abiding place to be affected.

During the day Tom King was restless to the utmost degree. His impatience made him feel as though night would never come.

No sooner was it dusk than he was in perfect readiness to start.

His pistols had been loaded and put ready for use, his horse saddled, and every possible preparation made at least an hour before.

Dick restrained him until it was really dark enough for him to take his departure safely.

No prisoner released from a long and weary confinement ever felt more elation of spirits than Tom King.

He would have shouted out aloud in his gratification, but the manifest imprudence of doing so fortunately presented itself to him and restrained him.

Dick Turpin and Maud watched him till he passed out of sight, then the former turned round to the ostler and said:

"Is Black Bess saddled?"

"Yes, captain."

Maud clung to Dick's arm, and looked appealingly into his face.

"Surely—surely," she said, in a tremulous voice, "you are not going away to-night?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Consider I am quite alone."

"There is Jack. He will keep good watch and ward."

"I do not doubt it; still think what long and weary hours they will be till you return; besides, Claude and Jack are absent, and how can you tell but what they may be in danger?"

"All the better reason, then," said Dick, smiling, "why I should go out in quest of them. I might chance to be of real service."

"No, no—for once stay he off!"

"As you wish, Maud," said Dick, after a brief pause; then, turning to the ostler, he said: "Take the saddles and bridle off again. Black Boss shall have a rest to-night."

With these words Maud and Dick made their way down below, where we will leave them watching for the return of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, while we follow in the footsteps of Tom King.

The elation of spirits which he experienced, increased rather than otherwise as soon as his horse broke out into a gallop. The animal was very fresh and full of spirit, in consequence of the long rest it had had.

Tom King was so familiar with the country that he was able to take his way almost in a direct line to the bridge over the river Brent, which, it will be remembered, was the appointed spot.

He was sorely tempted to indulge in some adventure on the way; but the uncertainty of how long it might be the means of delaying him, and the remembrance of the importance of reaching the bridge early, enabled him each time to overcome the inclination.

Coming at length to a portion of the river Brent at some distance from the spot where it flowed under the Edgware Road, he pulled up his steed and indulged in a brief consideration as to the best thing he could do.

He quickly determined to follow the windings of the little stream, which, at the place where he had halted, seemed more to deserve the name of brook than the ambitious appellation river.

Tom recollected that near the old bridge the river was bordered on one side by a line of tall, stately trees.

Under cover of these he expected to be able to reach the appointed spot without danger of being seen by anyone.

The event proved him to be perfectly right.

The night was not a dark one, yet the shadow cast by the row of trees was dense indeed.

Upon reaching the bridge, Tom alighted, and secured his horse to a tree in such a manner that he could feed in plenty upon the luxuriant grass beneath his feet.

This done, the highwayman crept cautiously forward on foot, and at length took up his position behind a projecting buttress of the structure.

The kind of recess in which he took up his station was wrapped in such obscurity that a passer-by would have required a keen eye to detect him.

From this point Tom King commanded a view of the whole of the bridge, and also of a considerable portion of the road stretching towards London, so that it was quite impossible for anyone to approach from this direction unseen by him.

The silence was profound, and on that one particular night the Edgware Road appeared to be deserted.

This soon began to grow very irksome to Tom, when, all at once, the idea flashed across his mind that old Matthew's messenger might have come and gone, and that the letter he was waiting for might be at that very moment lying beneath the stone.

This was a point Tom resolved to satisfy himself upon without delay, but first he listened intently in order to make sure that no one was close at hand.

The continuance of the unbroken silence made him certain that he had the place all to himself, and that a more favorable opportunity than the present could not be found.

Accordingly he quitted his hiding-place, and with rapid steps made his way to the opposite end of the bridge.

Selecting the stone which had been described to him, he lifted it carefully.

But there was no letter beneath it.

Resolved to be satisfied beyond all possibility of doubt, he lifted successively every stone he could find loose upon the parapet.

This examination convinced him that old Matthew's messenger had not arrived.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs coming upon his ears at this moment warned him to once more seek shelter in his hiding-place.

Ere long a horseman appeared in sight, and as he drew

nearer the bridge he reduced his horse's pace, which made Tom think that this must be the messenger.

He quickly found, however, that he was mistaken.

The traveller had merely reined in his steed to ease him up the rather steep hill which led on to the bridge.

Upon reaching the summit the horse was again put in motion, and the traveller rode on.

Tom gazed after him longingly.

Somehow or other, and certainly without any good or sufficient reason, the idea had taken firm possession of Tom's mind that Matthew's messenger would be of the male sex and that he would arrive on horseback.

Therefore when, some time afterwards, his quick ear detected a light footfall on the hard road, he paid no attention to it.

Presently, however, a female form appeared walking slowly up the hill.

Tom looked at her attentively for the simple reason that he had nothing else upon which to bestow his notice.

As she came nearer, Tom perceived there was a certain air of mystery about her, for she glanced behind her repeatedly with an air of apprehensiveness, as though she feared some one was behind her watching her movements.

Upon nearing the bridge her pace increased until she fairly stood upon it.

Then she stopped abruptly.

She listened.

Then, with great rapidity, she darted to the left side of the bridge, lifted a loose stone from it, and afterwards Tom distinctly saw her place a letter beneath it.

No sooner was this action performed than the girl bounded on as swiftly as an antelope, passing Tom King in his hiding-place so closely as almost to touch him with her garments.

"That's neatly done," said Tom King. "And now for the letter. The sooner I take possession of it the better, that's certain! Ah! what is that?"

Tom heard a slight noise, and darted back into his place of concealment just in time.

Peering out cautiously, he saw a dusky figure approaching.

It was a man.

He was glancing around him with great keenness.

When he came fairly on the bridge he paused, and Tom King heard him mutter:

"That's the little game, is it? Well, I'll see if I can't spoil it, as sure as my name's Bishop. I'll keep an eye upon you, my lady—I shall know you again, never fear!"

Upon hearing these words, Tom King did indeed congratulate himself upon having got back to his hiding-place in good time.

He could see the new-comer now very plainly.

His dress proclaimed him to be a police officer.

It was indeed no other than the individual who had tried so unsuccessfully to capture Dick Tarpin in the stable at Piccadilly.

"Confound the fellow!" Tom King said, mentally. "He has been following and watching that girl, and of course has seen her secrete the letter."

Tom said this, and endeavored to reconcile himself to it as a certainty, yet at the same time hoped that the contrary would prove to be the case.

Whatever suspense he may have felt in this respect was very quickly put an end to, for Bishop, the officer, said:

"I saw her with a letter—I'm sure I saw her with a letter, and she has hidden it somewhere on the bridge—under one of these loose stones, I expect."

From these words it became manifest that he had not been near enough to observe where the letter had really been placed.

But in a very matter-of-fact, business-like way he lifted the stones one after the other, looking carefully under every one before he replaced it.

All at once he uttered an ejaculation

The letter had been found.

"What shall I do now?" asked Tom King, of himself. "I must have that letter, and the question is which will be the best way to obtain it?"

This promised to be a very difficult problem, and its difficulty was increased owing to the fact that Tom King's attention was pretty fully occupied in watching the

movements of the officer, and this distraction prevented him from giving the subject proper consideration.

"I wonder what the letter is about?" was Bishop's next remark, as he seated himself upon the parapet of the bridge. "I ought to find out who it's addressed to, at any rate. Ha, ha! If it should turn out as I expect, I rather think I shall have you, Mr. Matthew Gale, clever as you think yourself! Ha, ha! I should catch you there nicely! Wait a bit!"

Bishop placed the letter carefully beside him, and then began fumbling in his pockets.

The first object he produced was from the skirt of his coat.

It was something dark looking, and afterwards proved to be one of those dark lanterns which all police officers made a point of carrying.

After a little delay the officer succeeded in lighting his lantern, for the wind blew rather strongly on the bridge, making this operation a matter of no small difficulty.

Then he said, in a satisfied tone, as a broad beam of light came shining through the lens:

"There, that will do nicely. Now to see the address on the letter. Really, I do believe this will turn out to be about the best night's work I have ever done!"

The letter was then placed so that the light of the lantern fell fully upon it.

Bishop uttered an exclamation of angry impatience.

"Confound his caution!" he cried. "But I might have expected as much—it's just like him. But I'll try my best to nail him, and so I'll see what the letter contains."

There could be no doubt that Bishop fully expected that he was about to make some very important discovery—indeed, he fairly believed that the communication he held in his hand was of such a character as to place old Matthew completely in his power.

A dreadful disappointment was in store for him, as the reader very well knows.

With much superfluous caution, the officer opened the letter and unfolded it.

"Hullo!" he cried. "What's this? Am I done after all? Is there nothing in it? There must be something surely; and yet perhaps this paper was only placed here to throw me off the right track. The girl may have gone on with the real letter, and by this time doubtless has delivered it."

This was such a dreadful idea that the officer felt almost inclined to fling himself backward off the parapet of the bridge into the water below.

Indeed, in his state of intense aggravation, there is no knowing what he might have done, had not his eyes all at once lighted upon something in the letter.

"Ah!" he cried, "what's this?—something after all?"

He looked closely, and then perceived the figures that Matthew, in case of such a contingency as the present, had agreed to write.

"What does it mean?" asked Bishop, looking up and apparently addressing himself to the obscurity around him—"what does it mean? '9,' and then '21'?" Who can make anything out of such a letter as that?"

Having asked this question, Bishop made a microscopic examination of the sheet of paper, the result of which was to convince him that nothing more than the figures had been written upon it.

Then he appeared to give himself up to deep reflection.

Tom King was full of exaltation.

"Bravo, Matthew!" he exclaimed, mentally. "You are a clever fellow—indeed you are—a wonderfully clever fellow! 9 and 21! I shall not forget. That is all I want to know. Ha, ha! Mr. Bishop, you have been so sagacious actually as to outwit yourself."

Tom King's satisfaction is something to be imagined more than described.

"I'll be off now," he murmured. "I know all that I wish to learn, and, if I do not linger here, I shall have time, perhaps, for an adventure. No doubt I can steal away unheard and unperceived, and very likely if I stay here a little longer, Mr. Bishop will be good enough to take his departure."

Tom's attention was now particularly directed towards the officer, who by this time seemed to have reached a definite point in his reflections.

"I'll put the letter back again," he said, as he put his finger cunningly by the side of his nose—"that's what I'll do. I'll put it where I found it, and then I'll hide. Ha, ha! capital! That letter is put here for somebody who hasn't arrived yet, and if I stay here he won't approach. Who knows, it may be Dick Turpin who is coming, and if so, I'll have him, dead or alive—I don't care which of the two."

With these words, Bishop quitted his sitting position on the parapet of the bridge, and carefully placed the letter where he had found it.

"Now I'll hide," he muttered. "Let me see, where is the best place? Why, yonder buttress, of course! I should think it was made on purpose. I'll hide there, and wait patiently—yes, patiently, for in this instance I feel sure patience will meet with its due reward."

So saying, Mr. Bishop put his legs in motion.

From the direction in which he now made his way, it was evident the buttress he had decided upon as being a good hiding-place was the very one behind which Tom King had ensconced himself.

Immediately upon making this discovery, Tom King cautiously withdrew, and so well did he accomplish his difficult task that he got completely away without causing Bishop to have the remotest suspicion that any other human being save himself was near.

Tom King glided gradually away, but ere he had gone far an unexpected difficulty presented itself.

If Bishop should keep a sharp look-out—as beyond a doubt he would—Tom felt it would be next to an impossibility to make his way unseen to the spot where he had left his horse.

It is true he might have managed to get off without any danger of an encounter with the officer, but that was not what Tom wanted.

He was exceedingly anxious that Bishop should remain all night watching behind the buttress.

"I'll find some means of circumventing you yet," the highwayman said to himself, as he glanced back at the tenant of his late hiding-place. "You shall have no suspicion of my presence, and you shall have the comfort of a long watch in the cold till daylight. If all is quiet, he may even in his exceeding cleverness be fool enough to come here to-morrow night. I hope he does—it will keep him out of further mischief."

With these words Tom King set himself in motion again, and, as there was no longer so much need of silence in his movements, he made much more rapid progress.

He made a very considerable detour, and at length emerged upon the high-road at a spot rather less than half a mile from the bridge.

No sooner had he reached here, however, than he heard a sound upon the road which told him that a traveller of some kind or other was approaching.

"I don't like to pad the hoof," said Tom, to himself; "still, it would be a capital joke to do a bit of business while that highly-intelligent and astute officer, Bishop, was so close at hand."

CHAPTER CMXOVI.

TOM KING TAKES A PRIZE, AND BEFOOLS THE OLD MISER TO HIS HEART'S CONTENT, AND BISHOP, THE OFFICER, AS WELL.

To attempt to stop a traveller in such near proximity to a police officer seemed to be a needlessly daring and reckless experiment; but by the way in which Tom King produced his piece, it became evident that he fully intended to carry his expressed resolution into effect.

"How wild old Bishop will be with himself," he muttered, "when he comes to know what has taken place. He will wish he had employed his time better than by watching on the bridge. Ha! the traveller is close at hand. I shall soon see whether I am to have anything worth while for my trouble."

Tom was right.

The traveller was indeed very close at hand.

On he came at a steady jog-trot pace, little thinking of the interruption he was so soon to meet with.

"Hold!" said Tom King, the next moment—"hold, I say! Pull up, on your life!"

He spoke in a suppressed tone, for he did not want his voice to travel far through the still night air.

As long as it reached the ears of the traveller and made some impression upon him, that was all he required.

His command was obeyed.

"What is it—oh, what is it?"

The trembling tones of the voice and the appearance of the rider made Tom King aware that it was an aged man he had stopped.

He also saw that he presented the oddest figure he had ever seen.

His clothes were of the most tattered description, seeming here and there to hold together by nothing but a thread, while the animal he bestrode was a vicious-looking mule, that seemed to be quite as odd a character as its rider.

At a first glance, one would have come to the conclusion that this old man was miserably poor; but a more attentive observation, such as Tom King bestowed upon him, served to show that his poverty was more assumed than real.

Moreover, the highwayman's keen eyes detected that, upon being challenged, the old man suddenly clasped his hands over his breast, as though he had something of value secreted there.

In reply to his question, Tom King said:

"I want what money and valuables you may happen to have with you! Be quick—hand them over, for there is a police officer a little way up the road!"

The old man laughed a shrill, imbecile laugh.

"The idea now, that anyone should think of robbing a poor wretch like myself! Why, I am not worth a groat—absolutely not worth a groat! Let me pass on in peace, young man, otherwise I will raise my voice and summon the police officer you mentioned. Ha—ha!"

"If you did," replied Tom King, with a most menacing voice and gesture, "that cry would be your last! Before you had well finished uttering it the bullet in this pistol would clear a passage through your skull."

"Nay—nay, young man!" said the traveller, with increasing agitation and uneasiness. "Never mind threats, but allow me to pass on. I am poor—oh, so very, very poor!"

"That may be; and yet I am not going to allow you to proceed until I have thoroughly satisfied myself that you do not carry anything about you that I think worth taking."

The old man uttered a cry of dismay.

"No—no!" he exclaimed. "You are wrong—quite wrong!"

He would have pushed on, but Tom prevented him.

"Hark ye!" he said, "I am not inclined to stand any bother! Either you must give me what you have, or else I must search you; and, for your information, let me tell you that I never search a living person—I shoot them first, and then examine their pockets afterwards."

This threat greatly terrified the old man, who pressed his hands more tightly than ever upon his breast.

"I have nothing," he repeated—"absolutely nothing!"

"Then what is that you hold so tightly?"

"Hold so tightly?"

"Yes—I spoke plainly enough, did I not?"

"Well, then—a—it—it—is nothing!"

"False!" said Tom—"false!"

He had been watching the old man closely, and now availed himself of an opportunity to seize him by the breast of his apparel, for at the moment when he replied the old man had removed his hands.

A loud yell was the result of this action.

Then a frantic but vain struggle.

Tom King felt something hard, and the next moment beheld in his hands a large leather bag so full of money that scarcely room was left to tie up the mouth.

"What do you call this?" said Tom King, as he flung the heavy bag in the air and dexterously caught it as it descended. "How could you sit there and proclaim such a monstrous falsehood?"

But the old miser, for such indeed he was, suffered too much agony of spirit to be able to pay any attention to what the highwayman said.

"My gold!" he said—"my gold! Give me back my precious treasure! It has cost me years and years to amass it, and many a sleepless night to guard it. Oh, if I had only taken the landlord's advice and stopped at his inn all night, this would not have happened! Oh, my gold—my gold! What now will become of me?"

The apparently old man—for he was not old in reality, but merely aged with penury and anxiety of mind—fairly wept over his loss like a little child.

But the spectacle of so much avarice raised no feelings of compunction in Tom's breast. He believed that he was really doing the poor wretch a service by despoiling him.

"Hlde on!" he said, "or if you linger I may be tempted to make a further search about your person, and then I doubt not I shall discover some other hoard. Feel thankful that I have let you off so easily, for your avarice and lying deceit disgust me!"

Mournfully and sadly the old miser set his mule in motion.

Tom King gazed after him with mingled feelings, but ere he had gone many yards a fresh thought entered Tom's mind, and acting impulsively upon it, he said:

"Stop—stop, my friend! I want to speak to you! I have something of importance to say—something that will very likely turn out to your advantage."

Hearing these words, the old man, after a little hesitation, pulled up.

"If you like to render me a little service," cried Tom King, a wicked smile playing round his lips the while, which the old man, owing to the darkness, could not see—"if you are willing to do what I require, I will, by way of recompense, give you back the bag of gold I have just taken from you."

"What—what is that you say?"

"You are incredulous; but, believe me, I am quite in earnest."

"What is it, then, you want me to do?—some fearful crime, perhaps? What is it that I can do to be worth so great a sum?"

"I place a different value upon money to what you do. But, in a word, are you willing to undertake this service?"

"What is it?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

The miser leaned forward eagerly.

"A little further on along the road you will come to an old stone bridge that crosses the river Brant."

"Yes—yes, I know it well."

"Attend, then. Under one of the loose stones upon the parapet there is a letter. I want you to go there, fetch it, and bring it to me."

"And is this all?" asked the miser, in tones of wonder. "Would you pay so much for this slight service?"

"I have said so."

"Then—then—"

"Then what?"

"There must be some special and hidden danger connected with it?"

Tom nodded.

"There most certainly is," he replied.

"But let me know its nature."

"I am quite willing. You must know, then, that I have good reason to believe that the bridge is well watched by police officers, who are on the look-out to capture me. The letter contains the description of the place where a treasure of mine has hidden a vast treasure."

"Treasure, say you?" for the old man's faculties became, if possible, doubly sharpened by the pronunciation of this word.

"Yes, treasure! You understand, my comrade buried it, then wrote down a description of the place, and left it beneath the stone."

"Then why not fetch it?"

"Because if I venture to go near, the officers will seize me, while of you they will have no suspicion whatever. You can take up the letter, bring it back to me, and when you do I promise faithfully to return you your bag of gold."

The old miser's eyes sparkled brightly.

"It is a bargain," he cried—"it is a bargain!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Tom. "Set forward now, at once."

"And where shall I find you?"

"I will sit down here upon this old milestone, and wait patiently for your return."

"Good—good! Do not stir."

"I will not, depend upon it. Be quick!"

"I will; and if you do not stir I shall be sure to be able to find you."

The old miser, without another word, urged his mule forward at the best speed it was capable of making, which was not very rapid.

Tom King watched him for some moments.

He observed the old man frequently and anxiously look round, in order to be sure that Tom had not stirred.

The latter waited until a turn in the roadway hid him from his sight.

Then he sprang from his feet.

"If events turn out as I believe they will," he exclaimed, "you will be taught a lesson you will never forget to your dying day—perhaps it may cure you of your insatiable avarice—and it is pretty sure to make a fool of clever Mr. Bishop."

Having uttered these words half aloud, Tom sprang lightly over the low hedge that bordered the high-road.

He alighted upon the soft turf of a meadow, and then, crouching down, he ran along at a rapid rate.

He did not keep altogether under the shadow of the hedge, but left it some distance on his left.

By doing this, he cut off the curve of the high-road.

Having gone some distance in a straight line, he reached the hedge, and waited there a moment, partly to recover his spent breath and partly to listen.

He then discovered that he had outstripped the old miser, who came jogging along and muttering all the time.

"Yes—yes," Tom overheard him say, "I can see my way clearly now in all I have to do. Yes—yes, beyond all doubt this will turn out a good night's work for me. What a shallow fool he must be. Let me consider now how I shall act. I will, first of all, obtain possession of this letter he speaks of—I will secure it. Fool—fool, to let me know that it contained such priceless information! Then, having done that, I will find out the officers who are lurking near, and tell them where the rascal can be found. Yes, yes—that will be it. They will make their way round to him by the meadows, and pounce out upon him. Yes, yes—of course; and if necessary, I can hold him in conversation. I shall then get my share of the reward—perhaps recover possession of what he has robbed me of, and—then—then afterwards," he added, in shrill tones, "I will repair to this secret spot, and obtain possession of the buried treasure!"

Either he had brought all his arrangements to a satisfactory termination, or else the prospect of obtaining the buried treasure overpowered him to such a degree that he could only muse upon it, not speak, for having said so much he became silent.

"Just what I expected," said Tom, mentally, "though I scarcely thought I should obtain so good an insight into your plans. It will be a lesson for you, old man, and one which you richly deserve."

With these words, Tom King continued to make his way forward, though this time with more caution.

He was as anxious to get as close to the bridge as he could without being perceived, in order that he might be an observer of the scene that was about to be enacted.

To this end, he followed in the footsteps of the old miser, whose mule went at his steady jog-trot on to the bridge.

Oh, how Tom laughed and chuckled to himself!

The old miser had comprehended very well whereabouts the letter had been hidden.

So well that the first stone he raised proved to have the letter beneath it.

He seized the precious paper with a frantic gesture of delight.

But his feelings were destined to undergo a thorough alteration.

Bishop, the officer, had watched the old man seize the letter with almost as much extravagant delight as the old miser himself had experienced.

Like some wild beast that had been long and patiently awaiting the coming of its prey, he bounded out of his hiding-place and seized the miser by the back of the neck with a grip so powerful that it forced him to utter a loud yell of surprise and fear.

Bishop nothing doubted that he had got one of the highwaymen in his grasp, who had thus disguised himself in order to avoid recognition.

It was a very probable supposition indeed for him to

"Release me!" said the old man, speaking with much difficulty—"release me, I say!"

"Oh yes! of course I shall—you may depend I shall do that! Is there anything else in a trifling way you would like? If so, speak out—don't be bashful, pray!"

Bishop was so delighted that he grew quite facetious.

"You make a mistake in seizing me!" whined the miser. "I am no highwayman!"

"Very likely not; but I intend to take you whether you are or not—so surrender, and let us have no more fuss!"

The miser groaned.

"Ay, groan away!" cried Bishop, in great exultation. "You feel very bad, I daresay; but you will feel worse before long! Short work will be made of you, that I can promise you!"

"I am a wretched man!"

"No doubt of it."

"I am lost—lost!"

"Not a bit of it, my spark; it rather strikes me you're found! Ha, ha!"

At which stroke of wit Bishop laughed so heartily that he almost released his hold upon the miser's collar.

"Get your lantern," cried the latter, at length—"get your lantern, I say, and look in my face! You will see then that you have made a mistake—a great mistake! You will find I am not the man you take me for!"

By this time Bishop's excitement had abated somewhat, and consequently, being calmer, the old man's peculiar, shrill voice falling upon his ears, made him feel cold and clammy with a dreadful doubt.

Surely such a voice as that was not simulated.

In his nervous agitation, he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth his lantern.

It was still burning.

With an unsteady hand, he directed the light upon the old miser's countenance.

The very first glance at the pinched features and attenuated form convinced him that it was no highwayman he held in his grasp.

With a sigh of bitter disappointment, he restored his lantern to his pocket.

"If you are not actually one of the accursed lot," he cried, wrathfully, "you are one of their agents, and being such, I will take good care that you receive in full the punishment which the law awards. Come with me—you are my prisoner! If you resist, it will be all the worse for you!"

"Mr. Officer!" said the miser, earnestly—so earnestly that Bishop felt constrained to pause and say:

"Well?"

"You are laboring under a great mistake. I am not indeed the man you take me for; but I assure you I know where he is, and if you will only listen to what I have to say, I will make a clean breast of all, and take you to where he is now awaiting my return."

"Cut along then," said Bishop, "and be quick!"

CHAPTER CMXCVII.

IN WHICH TOM KING GETS HIMSELF INTO SERIOUS TROUBLE.

"PATIENCE!" said the old man—"patience, and I will tell you. But I am old and I am frightened well-nigh out of my life."

"Well, go on, can't you?" interrupted Bishop, angrily.

"Don't let us have so much of your palaver!"

"As I was journeying along the road, I was stopped by a man who, with many fearful oaths, despoiled me of my purse and threatened to deprive me of my life."

"Where was this?"

"A few hundred yards off, down the road."

Bishop ground his teeth savagely.

"But at last," resumed the old man, "he promised to return me all he had taken from me if I would only undertake to render him a service. I asked him what it was, and he told me merely to fetch this letter, which he stated I should find hidden under one of the stones on the parapet of the bridge."

"Well, what then?" asked Bishop, in a suspicious tone.

"I agreed, and you seized me."

"And what arrangement did you make about the delivery of this letter?"



[THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN IN WAIT FOR THE PRISONERS' VAN.]

"I will tell you. The robber promised to remain seated on a milestone about half a mile hence, where I left him, until I came back. Then I was to give up the letter in exchange for the purse."

Having heard this much, Bishop for several moments gave himself up to deep reflection.

At last, in a wrathful voice, he said:

"Old man, I believe you to be neither more nor less than an infernal liar!"

"I'll swear I speak the truth!"

"I don't doubt but what you would swear to anything. Of one thing I am certain: If you are not actually one of the men I am so anxious to capture you are at least one of their accomplices. Don't deny it, for to prove you I will walk quietly down the road with you to the milestone you mention, and if there is no one there I shall haul you off to jail, you may depend upon that!"

The old man wrung his hands in despair

"I am lost and undone!" he said.

"Why—why? What is the matter now? Does your heart begin to fail you?"

"No—no! I will swear by all that is sacred I speak nothing but the truth!"

"Come on, then! Why do you object that your words should be proved?"

"Because," replied the miser, "he will beyond a doubt be on the look-out, and when he finds I am returning with some one in my company he will conclude at once that I have betrayed him, and be off!"

This struck Bishop as being a very reasonable remark for in spite of all he had said to the contrary, he could not help thinking that the old miser was telling him the truth.

"Look here," he said, abruptly; "I will deprive you of even that excuse. I will go on the other side of the hedge and creep cautiously along under cover of it. He

will know nothing of my presence then. But if you attempt to escape I will put a stop to you by firing a bullet after you!"

"You have no occasion for such threats. It is not my intention to play you false."

"We shall soon see about that. Start on!"

"Yes, the sooner the better. The delay that is already taken place may make him suspicious."

Bishop just glanced at his pistols as he walked off the bridge.

Then forcing his way through a prickly hedge at the expense of his skin and clothing, he said:

"Ride on, old man, and beware how you attempt to play false with me."

The miser complied.

Tom King had been a witness of this scene with the most unbounded delight.

"Clever Mr. Bishop!" he said, as he emerged from his place of concealment. "You have overreached yourself this time and no mistake, and so have you, old man. Your covetousness will meet with its due reward, and I hope it will be the means of teaching you a lesson."

As the coast was now quite clear of his foes, Tom King, in the most leisurely manner possible, made his way to the spot where he had left his horse.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Bishop, for being so kind as to take yourself out of the way just at the time to suit me. I am very much obliged indeed!"

Tom found his horse in perfect safety.

He mounted and rode up on to the bridge.

By the time he reached it he could hear sounds of contention in the distance.

"They have failed to find me, I suppose. Well, here goes for something to bewilder them a little more, and after that I will be off!"

With these words, Tom King discharged two pistols in rapid succession.

The reports rang out clearly and sharply upon the still night air, and were doubtless heard far and wide.

The explosion of the gunpowder produced a momentary illumination.

After that a double darkness seemed to reign.

Tom King's object was to puzzle the police officer and the miser, and there can be no doubt but that he fully succeeded.

Of course he did not wait to hear the result, but at once rode off towards London.

He did not for long continue in this direction, for the night was already far gone—so far that it became time for him to think about making his course towards the ruined castle.

Yet he felt unwilling to make his way back there exactly until he had tried his hand at another adventure.

But as he continued to ride on he found the roads were completely deserted.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, as he pulled up at length at a spot where three roads diverged. "I wonder which will be the best way for me to take?"

He had nothing whatever to guide him in making his selection, and while he sat there debating, he was suddenly startled by a violent downpour of rain.

At first he could not make out what was the matter, the storm came on with so much suddenness.

The hard pelting of the hailstones, which were of unusual size, soon made him conscious that the pleasantest thing would be to seek out some place of shelter.

The question was, where would this be found?

He took the road before him at a venture, and soon discovered that his choice was a wise one, for directly he passed round a bend that was a few yards off he came in sight of a small public-house.

The sign that swung upon the post outside the door was creaking most dismally as the force of the wind compelled it to swing backwards and forwards with more than usual violence.

The exterior of the inn was completely dark, as though the inhabitants had long since retired to rest; but in despite of this, Tom King determined to make an effort to get shelter from the storm, the violence of which increased rather than abated.

"Hilloa—hilloa!" he shouted. "House—house! Hilloa!—house! Open—open!"

His words were echoed by a loud cry as if of execration,

and immediately afterwards a man appeared, who seemed to spring up out of the darkness so quickly that it was impossible to say from whence he came.

Nor was he much less speedy in disappearing, for he dashed past Tom King and forced his way through the hedgerow on the opposite side of the way.

He was gone almost before Tom King was thoroughly cognisant of his presence.

But the highwayman noticed that as he fled some rather heavy objects appeared to fall upon the ground.

To attempt to pursue this man was perfectly useless; moreover, Tom had no particular motive to do so.

But he could not resist the temptation of springing off his horse and looking to see what the man had dropped in his hasty flight.

The first thing Tom's hand came in contact with as he groped along the ground was a bag, which by its feel evidently contained money.

Tom King weighed it in his hand, then complacently consigned it to his pocket.

A few steps further on he found another bag of similar appearance; and perhaps there might have been another still further on, but he did not stop to look, for just then doors and windows were suddenly thrown open, showing that the inhabitants of the inn were thoroughly aroused.

Tom King advanced, leading his horse by the bridle.

"I want shelter from this storm," he said. "Can I have it, and can you put my horse under cover until the fury of it is past?"

"Yes, sir—yes—yes—certainly!"

At this moment loud sounds as of a great disturbance taking place within came upon their ears.

"I rather think," said Tom King, "that you have been robbed, for just as I pulled up before the door a man ran away at full speed, breaking his way through the hedgerow yonder."

"Thieves—thieves!" cried a loud voice at this moment—"thieves—thieves! I have been robbed! Call the police! Thieves—thieves!"

In front of the inn there was a large old-fashioned, overhanging porch, upon the trellis-work of which there grew in summer time quite a profusion of leaves, and it was under this that Tom had stood while these few words passed between him and the landlord.

The porch was quite large enough to shelter his horse, so Tom, without more ado, secured the reins to a ring in the doorpost.

Upon hearing these words from Tom King, and upon hearing the alarming cries in the house, the landlord stood struck with consternation.

Lights could now be seen approaching, and directly afterwards a throng of excited persons appeared in the entrance-passage of the inn.

Foremost was a tall, thin, wiry man, attired in a very singular-looking dressing-gown.

He sprang forward and clutched the landlord by the throat.

"Wretch—rascal! Do you hear what I say? But this is all your work! I might have guessed it when you showed yourself so anxious that I should stay here all night. You preached well about the dangers of the road but you said nothing about the dangers of this d—nable inn, curse you!"

"I protest," said the landlord, speaking with some difficulty, for the traveller's clutch upon his throat was a very tight one—"I protest I am quite innocent in the matter!"

"D—n you, yes—of course you are!"

"I am sure I am; and if you ask this gentleman he will tell you all—that just when he rode up he saw a man ride away."

"Yes, yes—it's all very well managed indeed! But let me tell you I can see a hole through a ladder before anyone knocks a round out. This is part of your plan Gentleman, forsooth!—more likely the robber!"

"You are heated," said Tom King, "and I excuse you for you are speaking quite at random. What I tell you is no more than the truth."

"Of course not—I know all about that, very well! Let me tell you I've seen a thing or two, and you won't impose upon me very easily."

"If you want to find the man who robbed you, just push through that gap in yonder hedgerow—that is the way he took."

"Wouldn't you like it? A light—a light! D—n it all, won't you give me a light? I will just have a look at this fly-by-night's face! What respectable traveller would be abroad at this hour? I may recognise him, for aught I know."

Upon hearing this, Tom King, as may be expected, felt anything but comfortable.

He wished to escape observation as much as possible, but, if the traveller did not happen to recognise him, perhaps when the light of a candle fell full upon his features some of the others would.

It was a very serious risk indeed, and Tom glanced around him without seeing any means by which he could avoid it.

During this conversation, he had been gradually surrounded and hemmed in by the various inmates of the inn, and to such an extent did they now press upon him that he could not possibly beat a rapid retreat.

A candle was quickly thrust into the traveller's hand.

He held it in such a manner that its rays fell full upon Tom's features.

"Ha!" he yelled, in a furious voice. "This is just what I expected! Now, then, to prove whether you are good men and true, or whether you are all rascally accomplices of this execrable wretch! Assist me to take him prisoner!" he cried, as he sprang at Tom, and fastened on his throat like a tiger.

"But who is it? What has he done?" cried all, in chorus.

"Done?—what hasn't he done? Why, he has robbed me to-night, and many another before me! But his time is up! This is Tom King, the highwayman! I will swear to it! I say again, this is Tom King the highwayman!"

CHAPTER CMXCVIII.

RELATES TOM KING'S ADVENTURES WITH THE TRAVELLER AT THE INN.

In anticipating the worst, Tom King had hardly thought that the stranger would have recognised him so readily, therefore our old friend was taken somewhat by surprise.

The feeling passed away so quickly, however, that not one of those who were present could have told that it had existence.

The people in the inn crowded closer and closer.

Tom's first act was to free himself from the stranger's grasp, a feat which apparently he performed with the greatest ease.

"Your loss has turned your brain, sir," he said, in a cold and haughty tone of voice, "and you may think yourself fortunate that I have not as sudden and hasty a temper as yourself, otherwise——"

Tom did not trouble himself to finish the sentence—the significant look with which he accompanied the words rendering it quite unnecessary.

All traces of his early life and training had not become extinct in Tom King. In spite of his continual attempts to disguise his nature, there were times when the true gentlemanly bearing would peep forth and show itself.

The present was one of them.

His manner caused the traveller for a moment to recoil, wondering whether he was a victim to a complete delusion of the senses.

But he quickly recovered himself, and, with a passionate exclamation, sprang forward again.

But this time Tom King was prepared for him, and stopped him.

"Keep your hands off!" he roared—"keep your hands off, or I shall lose all control over my temper!"

The stranger was awed.

Nevertheless, he cried out:

"I declare this is Tom King, the highwayman! I declare he has robbed me! If his pockets were searched, you would find my money upon him!"

This was true enough, and it seemed to be quite a problem how Tom would get out of his awkward position.

But Tom, with his ready mind, had thoroughly comprehended his situation, and, what was more, had resolved what to do.

"It is generally a hopeless task to attempt to reason with a man in your condition, but, if you like to step with me into any of these adjoining rooms, I will quickly give you a proof that you never made a greater mistake in all your life."

"Why not give the proof now?"

"Simply because I do not choose to do so, and, if you hesitate a moment longer, I shall refuse to satisfy you at all—mark that!"

Tom King's cool, collected, haughty bearing produced an immense effect upon the stranger.

Although it seemed against his inclination, he could not resist compliance.

Pushing open the door nearest to him, he strode into the chamber beyond.

Tom followed.

"Close the door," he said, as he entered, "and lock it as well."

"What for?"

"In order to guard against interruption; and, if you are still demented enough to persist in your belief, it will be a means of preventing my escape."

Whichever of these reasons it happened to be which weighed with the stranger does not matter; but he obeyed Tom's order, closing and locking the door.

Then, turning round, he said:

"Now, sir, as I have complied with all your demands, let me request you to be quick."

Tom King approached very closely.

Strangely enough, the traveller's suspicions were not at all excited.

But with the suddenness of lightning, Tom seized the stranger by the throat, at the same time that he thrust a pistol roughly into his mouth.

"A word," he murmured—"a syllable above a whisper, and your brains will be scattered round this room!"

The stranger turned pale, and was silent.

Much of his excitement had abated.

"Make no mistake," said Tom King—"I am indeed what you declared me to be; and your position just at the present moment is one of great danger, though perhaps you may not realise it. If you know anything of me, you will be certain that I shall be as good as my word in this affair."

Evidently the stranger thought so, for he neither offered to speak nor to make the slightest movement.

The knowledge that the muzzle of a cocked pistol was between his teeth, and that its trigger was encircled by Tom's finger overawed him.

"You might have known that single-handed you could be no match for me. You do not take into account that when a man is fighting for his life he would do that from which all others not so circumstanced would naturally shrink. I could have escaped without this trouble, but I did not want a hue and cry at my heels—do you understand?"

The traveller nodded, to show that he thoroughly comprehended.

"Then," said Tom King, "you will have to submit to be bound and gagged. When I know you are safe I shall take my departure from the inn. You will not suffer the inconvenience long—the people here will soon peep in upon you."

"But my money?" the traveller managed to summon up courage enough to utter.

"I tell you the truth concerning it," replied Tom King, "and you may believe me or not, just as you like; I am quite indifferent upon the point. Once more I repeat that when I rode up to the front door a man hastily started up and ran away; I have not the least doubt that he was the robber."

"Then have pity upon me," said the traveller, in a husky voice, "for I assure you I am a worthy object of commiseration. The money and valuables I have lost represent a very large sum indeed. Had the amount been my own, I could have borne my loss with more patience; but, unfortunately, I only held it in trust for another. In fact, sir, as you have kindly taken away the pistol, I assure you that I am neither more nor less than a commercial traveller, and the goods I carry with me consist of watches, rings, and other such articles—very valuable, and all lying in a small space. To-night, at this accursed inn, I have lost all. I question whether I shall ever recover a fraction."

Tom was silent. He was interested in what the traveller was stating; but he kept a sharp eye upon him, and waited to hear more.

"My master," continued the commercial traveller, "is a Jew, and as I don't happen to be of his religion he will have no mercy upon me. I am a ruined man; and when I make known my loss, what will become of my poor wife and children I know not. And yet, in what way am I to blame, except that the violence of the weather—which I ought to have disregarded—made me comply with the urgent solicitations of the landlord to remain all night at this place."

"I do not see that you are to blame," replied Tom King, for the great distress which the traveller manifested touched him to the heart.

But his words produced no consoling effect.

"Go," said the traveller—"go! I will do nothing to hinder your departure—I will not say one syllable. I will take your word that you have had no hand in robbing me of what I have lost."

He sank down upon a seat while he spoke, and bowing down his head, covered his face with his hands.

Tom King moved slowly towards the door; but when within a few paces of it he paused, and stood irresolute.

The traveller appeared to be unconscious of everything.

Tom King did not feel quite at his ease, and while he continued to gaze upon the sorrowing form he felt less and less so.

The traveller had acquitted him of all share in the robbery; but this was wrong, and Tom felt it to be so.

Then a struggle began in his breast.

Should he give up the two bags of money he had picked up? Surely that would be better than taking them away.

Thinking so, Tom King turned round with the intention of restoring them; but all at once he thought how strange it would be for them to be found in his possession, for the stranger had stated his disbelief that Tom had had any hand in the robbery, and our friend had not denied it.

Quickly he thought of a means by which he could relieve himself of his embarrassment.

Taking from his pocket the money he had obtained from the miser, he exclaimed:

"Look, sir—to show you there is such a thing sometimes as good returned for evil, I give you this money. Take it, and never mind troubling yourself to utter thanks; you are heartily welcome. Not a word! I am off."

The traveller took with trembling hands the wealth that was so unexpectedly offered him.

But he was not going to allow Tom to depart so easily.

Springing up, he caught him by the hands, and in a broken voice, poured out his thanks.

So firm was his grasp that Tom felt himself unable to shake it off without doing so roughly.

At length the traveller, completely overcome by what had taken place, burst into tears.

Tom took this opportunity to break away from him.

But ere he left the room he exclaimed:

"I have good reason to think the robber was disturbed, and that in his hasty flight he dropped some portion of his booty, which he did not dare stop to pick up. He broke through the gap in the hedge yonder, so you will have no difficulty in getting upon his track."

With these last words, Tom King passed hastily through the doorway.

Just outside he encountered the landlord and the other inmates of the inn, who doubtless had been eager listeners to what few chance words happened to fall upon their ears.

They regarded Tom King distrustfully.

But the highwayman took not the least notice of this, apparently but said, with admirable coolness:

"The storm is well over now, I think. Good night, gentlemen. I think if you go in yonder room you will find that I have succeeded in satisfying the gentleman that he was laboring under a most extraordinary delusion."

There was a general move in the direction of the room the traveller occupied.

Tom took advantage of it.

Passing out quickly, he sprang into the saddle, and rode rapidly away.

The storm was indeed fairly over, but a soft and gentle summer rain was falling.

This Tom paid no attention to—in fact, he found the cool sprinkling drop rather agreeable than otherwise.

He was not in the mood for any further adventures that night, so turned his horse's head at once in the direction of the ruins.

Fortunate it was that he did do so, for although he made quite as much speed as he well could without distressing his horse, daylight was very close at hand indeed when he arrived.

He found Dick Turpin waiting for him at the usual spot amid the ruins, and quickly learned that the captain had yielded to Maud's persuasions, and had remained there all the night.

Dick was very anxious about the letter.

"Did you get it?" he asked.

"I did not. But yet I was made acquainted with the contents; but the circumstances were so very strange that I will relate them to you at full length."

"Satisfy me first," said Dick, "what time they start."

"At nine o'clock."

"In the morning?"

"I suppose so."

"And the day?"

"The twenty-first."

"Two days hence," said Turpin, musingly. "That will give us time to mature all our plans and make every preparation. There is only one thing that I am afraid of."

"What is that, captain?"

"Why, starting at so early an hour in the morning, I am afraid they will reach their destination by daylight, in which case the difficulties of our task would be increased tenfold."

"Yet they must be overcome."

"Yes, as you say, they must be overcome; and, between now and the time mentioned, we shall have ample opportunities for consideration."

"We shall. But where are Claude and Jack?"

"Not returned."

"Not returned?"

"No—I have seen nothing of them since they left last night—or, rather, the night before last, for it is fairly morning now."

"It is. I sadly fear——"

"That something serious has happened to them?"

"I do indeed."

"That, also, is my fear. Still, a little time must elapse between now and daylight. Let us hope that they will return."

Tom did not say a word in reply, for his mind was full of uneasiness on account of his absent comrades.

He shifted his position to a place where he was able to obtain a more extensive view of the way by which they would be likely to approach, and looked out anxiously.

But he was unable to see anything of them.

Dick placed himself by his old companion's side, and immediately afterwards they were joined by Maud.

She needed only to give one glance at their countenances to see that their minds were greatly troubled.

"What is it?" she asked—"oh, what is it?"

Her tones were filled with alarm.

"Nothing—nothing serious—that is, at present."

"But tell me!"

"It is a dread."

"Caused by the long-continued absence of Claude and Jack?"

"Yes, Maud, that is it. When they did not return yesterday morning I thought but little of it, believing that they had got too far away to be able to return without the risk of being seen. But if that supposition had been correct, they would have been here soon after midnight."

"Yes, that was the arrangement," said Tom King.

"Then," exclaimed Maud, in much anxiety, "you justly dread that some serious accident has befallen them?"

Dick was silent, but Tom King said:

"Certainly, our uneasiness ought to abate when we think

how well competent both are to take care of themselves, and how often they have got themselves out of difficult situations."

But Dick Turpin appeared to derive but little consolation from this reflection.

As minute after minute passed away, the gloom upon Dick Turpin's countenance settled and deepened while Claude's features soon became the reflex of his own.

And thus they stood and watched for the coming of the absent ones, and while thus engaged and a prey to all manner of anxious doubts and fears, we will go back and endeavor to explain the mystery of their long absence.

It will be recollected that Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both set off together with no other object before them than that of obtaining an additional amount of money to be placed along with that they had already in their possession.

The purpose for which this money was destined we need scarcely inform the reader was to enable Tom Davis and his relations to quit England, and find them in such means as would enable them to live in tolerable comfort and independence abroad.

Whether the highwaymen were ever destined to achieve this important purpose time alone can show, but, as we have said, we will in the meantime follow the fortunes of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, on whose behalf it is hoped the reader feels the same amount of anxiousness as their companions in the ruins.

CHAPTER CXXIX.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEEK FRESH GROUND FOR THEIR ADVENTURES.

We go back, then, to the time when they took their departure.

For some considerable period, the highwaymen rode onward without pausing. This was for a double reason. They did not wish to make an attack too near their present abiding-place, and, what was still more cogent, they did not meet with anyone, so they were not assailed by temptation.

"The roads seem empty enough to-night, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack—"at present by no means promising for our expedition."

"You are right," was the reply. "Do you know what I have just been thinking?"

"No."

"Well, then, I will tell you. It is that for once in a way we quit the highway and try our fortune in some of the by-lanes, or cross-country roads."

"But why?"

"Because it is so generally known how unsafe the high-roads are, and therefore I fancy people are in the habit of making their way from place to place by other routes, less frequented in a general way, and therefore by them considered as safer."

Sixteen-String Jack reined-in his steed as he said:

"Claude, my friend, there is a very great deal of truth in what you say, depend upon it; I wonder we have not thought of that before."

"Well, it is all in good time."

"So it is."

"Are you agreed, then, that we shall turn down the next narrow turning we come to?"

"Yes—quite."

"Forward, then."

At a more gentle rate of speed than before, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack took their way along the high-road.

Ere they had gone far, they came upon the entrance of one of those picturesque, leafy lanes that form so characteristic a feature in English scenery.

So densely overgrown was it that had the highwaymen been journeying along more rapidly they would in all probability have passed it unperceived.

"Here we are, then," said Claude, changing the direction of his horse's head.

Sixteen-String Jack followed his example.

It was intensely dark; but after going about thirty yards, the trees on each side by no means grew so thickly, so that it was much lighter in consequence.

They pushed on for nearly a mile at a tolerable speed,

then they paused, in order to allow their horses to ascend a hill.

It was not that this hill was so very steep, but the ground underfoot was very miry, and as the soil was of a clayey character it clung almost as heavily to the horses' hoofs as new-ploughed land would have done.

"There is one thing about these lanes, Claude," said Jack "if their condition in a general way is at all like this, they must be very unpleasant to travel over."

"You are right there; but people afraid of losing their purses would consider it of minor importance, I expect."

Just then the summit of the hill was reached, and at the same moment Sixteen-String Jack, with a slight exclamation, drew his horse close to one side of the lane, in order to be shadowed by the hedgerows.

"There is some vehicle below us, Claude, toiling up the hill. Draw aside, or we shall be seen."

Claude lost not a second in complying with this hastily-uttered injunction, and from the secure position he occupied, proceeded to reconnoitre.

He quickly made out the character of the approaching vehicle.

"Why, as I live, Jack, it is nothing more than a clumsy old waggon! Push on once more. The driver in all probability is fast asleep, and therefore will not heed us."

"Gently!" said Jack. "Do you know in all probability we shall find a booty in that waggon well worth our taking?"

"What makes you think so?"

"You must be aware that there are many who, whenever they can, adopt such a conveyance as this in preference to the stage-coach, because it costs much less money, and, by the rule you have just been mentioning, people travelling with valuable property may be riding in this waggon, being under the impression that by so doing they were running a much better chance of security."

"That is, if this waggon should happen to be empty."

"Of course; and as there will be little trouble to ascertain, I propose that we ride on."

"Why not wait till the waggon reaches the top of the hill?"

"We can stop it more easily where it is. Come on!"

No second bidding was needed, and so, at a smart trot, the highwaymen made the descent of the hill.

Reaching the waggon, Claude Duval cried, in a stentorian tone:

"Stop! Confound you, stop! Are you asleep that you can't see the toll-gate? Stop, I say—I want the toll!"

The driver was really asleep when Claude spoke. He knew from experience that his horses were well enough acquainted with the road to make their way to their destination by their own instinct.

But Claude's words bothered the driver completely.

Although he had been awakened so suddenly, yet he seemed to know just whereabouts he was, therefore he gazed about him with the most perfect bewilderment.

"Toll-gate?" he drawled, in a strong provincial dialect. "There's ne'er a toll-gate here, mun, nor never was. Get out—you're drunk! Come up, captain!"

The last words were addressed to the leading horse, who beyond shaking his ears lazily made no movement.

"Come," said Claude, "let us have no more nonsense. There's a toll-gate on this or any other road whenever we feel inclined to set one up. Keep still and quiet as you value your life."

"Highwaymen by Gorn!" ejaculated the waggoner.

"Yes, depend upon that."

A chorus of screams came at this moment from the interior of the vehicle, at once letting our friends know that it carried a living freight.

"Take care of the front, Jack, and just let me have the pleasure of looking after those inside."

Sixteen-String Jack complied without any hesitation, and Claude Duval rode direct to the back part of the waggon.

As usual, the interior of the vehicle was concealed from view by means of two huge canvas flaps, but Claude very quickly drew these on one side.

The interior of the waggon was then dimly revealed to him—the illumination, such as it was, proceeding from

a small oil lamp that was flickering as though at the point of extinction at the upper end of the waggon.

At the first glance Claude Duval saw that the vehicle contained several persons of both sexes.

But it would appear that he was even more distinctly beheld by the occupants of the waggon, for immediately upon his appearance there arose a general cry of dismay, while one fearfully stout old lady went right off into a faint at once, falling rather heavily upon the person who sat next to her.

As soon as ever he had a chance of making himself heard, Claude Duval spoke.

Taking off his hat and making a very deep and respectful bow, he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I beg you will not be under the least alarm: there is not the slightest occasion for it—that is, unless you wilfully bring danger upon yourselves, and I hope you have all too much sense to think of doing that."

"Since you are so d—nably polite," said a voice at the further end of the waggon, "perhaps you will be kind enough to inform us why we are thus stopped and hindered on our journey?"

"I have no objection whatever," replied Claude. "In fact, that was just what I was about to inform you when you spoke."

"What is it, then?"

"To levy a contribution upon you—not for any charitable purpose, mind—so please be generous. You will comprehend the facts of the case immediately when I inform you that this is a portion of my dominions, and it is always a custom for persons passing to pay tribute. That is my business on the present occasion, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope you will not delay me any longer than you can help."

Claude said all this in such a calm, matter-of-fact manner, that the people in the waggon looked at each other in perfect bewilderment.

"It's a d—d odd thing," said the voice which had previously spoken, "but I have travelled this way for many a year and never before heard of anything of the sort!"

"That may be," said Claude. "But as you are doubtless anxious to resume your journey, and as I am not desirous of losing any more time, I should be glad if you would at once begin to make a display of your liberality. Here, take my hat and pass it round—it will serve admirably well to receive donations."

But the person to whom he offered the hat refused to take it.

"Confound it, ma'am!" cried the individual upon whom a fainting female had chanced to fall, and who had been making frantic but unavailing efforts to restore her to consciousness. "Confound it, ma'am, wake up! You lie on a fellow just like a ton weight!"

There was a general laugh at this.

Claude Duval even joined in the merriment.

The incident was a most ludicrous one; the female was truly of Herculean dimensions, while the unhappy wight upon whom she had fallen was one of those little men who cannot be better or more forcibly described than by the word insignificant.

But his words were paid no attention to by his burden.

He strove at first to lift her up, but he might just as well have tried to lift up a house.

Then he endeavored to wriggle himself from underneath her, but in this second attempt he succeeded no better than in the first, so, with a sigh of despair, he was obliged to resign himself to his situation, being about as helpless as a worm under a stone.

"It seems to me," said another person who had not as yet spoken—"it seems to me that all this foolery means neither more nor less than highway robbery."

Claude assented by a bow and a smile.

"Highway robbery!" cried a shrill female voice. "Highway robbery! Do you hear that, Captain Septimus Smith, or have you turned deaf all of a sudden?"

"I hear it plain enough, ma'am—a d—d deal too plain!" said the first speaker, who, as it would appear, rejoiced in the name and title of Captain Septimus Smith.

"Then in that case, sir," said the lady, addressing him with still greater asperity of tone—"in that case, why don't you give us the opportunity of witnessing a little of your prowess? You were telling us all a little while

ago what you should do in such a case as this. Why don't you blow the robber's brains out at once? I would, pretty quick, if I only happened to be a man!"

"I wish you were, with all my heart!"

"Do you, you abominable wretch? But I'll be even with you, you contemptible, not-worth-looking-at scum of the earth! I'll be even with you, depend upon it! The idea of such a creature as you being a captain! Fudge! it's enough to make anyone sick!"

"Really, ladies and gentlemen," cried Claude Duval, in a deprecating tone of voice, "I am extremely sorry to interrupt your agreeable conversation, but the facts of the case are just as I have laid them before you. Once more I present my hat. Make it heavy enough to satisfy me, and you can depart in safety; until then you will remain where you are. I don't wish to threaten, but still if you persist in giving me trouble, I shall take the wheels off the waggon and leave you to perform the rest of your journey on foot. You won't like that, for perhaps I need not tell you this is a very lonely part of the country, and you will have to go a great distance before you either meet with a human habitation or any other means of conveyance."

"Come—come, all of you," said the little man with the fainting lady, and speaking with difficulty in consequence of the great weight upon his internal combinations, "why don't you contribute a little each, and let the gentleman ride away?"

"That is a very sensible speech indeed!" said Claude Duval, approvingly.

"Perhaps, my little Jacky," said the person who sat opposite to him, "you will be kind enough to set us the example."

This undignified epithet threw the little fellow into an ungovernable fury, but he managed to reply:

"How the devil do you think I am going to get to my pockets with this great porpus atop of me? I'll be d—d if she doesn't grow heavier every minute!"

Upon this the huge female uttered a scream.

"Oh, you have woke up at last, have you, ma'am? I'm glad to hear it! Just put out your strength a little, and then, perhaps, you will be able to raise yourself up, with my assistance."

"Your assistance, you miserable little dandiprat—your assistance? I wonder what good that would be? Talk of strength—why, you could not crack a flea, you contemptible, under-sized mortal!"

This scene in the waggon amused Claude mightily, and there is no knowing how long he might have felt disposed to remain as a witness of it had he not been aroused by the sound of Sixteen-String Jack's voice calling out to him in very impatient tones.

"Hark—hark!" exclaimed Claude. "Do you hear, ladies and gentlemen, my honorable companion is growing tired of being kept waiting so long. Be good enough to comply with my demands!"

"I'll be hanged," said a respectable-looking man, who sat at the tail-end of the waggon—"I'll be hanged if you are not about the coolest customer I ever met with or even heard of!"

"Yes, very likely—I always was. But excuse me—we must make a beginning, so, as you happen to sit nearest, be good enough to let me have your donation."

Although Claude Duval spoke in such a tone of banter, yet the person he addressed could tell that he was thoroughly in earnest, and he felt it would be unwise to tempt the highwayman too far.

Notwithstanding this conviction, he produced a purse, and flung it into Claude's hat with a very bad grace indeed.

"That is a capital commencement!" ejaculated the highwayman. "Pray hand it round to the next!"

This was done, and very slowly the hat made a complete circuit of the different people occupying the waggon.

At last it reached Claude.

He took hold of it with a very dissatisfied air, for, looking in, he saw that it contained very little indeed beyond the purse which had been first of all placed into it.

"Upon my word," he said, "this is what I call too bad—by far too bad! As there are so many young and charming ladies present"—here Claude made a bow and gave a glance which comprehended all of them—"I can

not bring myself to utter any threats or resort to any violent measures; but, unless I am treated better: I cannot say what I may be tempted to do!"

"Oh, you paltry villains!" cried the lady with the shrill voice. "How I wish I was a man, that I might give you an example of what a man's conduct ought to be in an affair like this! You mean-spirited wretches, either give up what you have and let us go on our way in quiet, or else stand up for your own, and fight it out like men!"

This martial address was, however, provocative of little effect.

Either the male travellers were sadly deficient in courage, or else they felt that they did not carry about with them enough of this world's wealth to make it worth their while to run any great risk in order to retain it.

"Very good!" responded Claude, in a deep voice, after a brief pause had taken place. "The lady speaks well. Just be good enough to let me know whether you intend to deliver up quietly what you have, or whether you intend to fight it out—I shall know then what to do."

CHAPTER M.

CONTINUES TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

THE travellers quickly came to a decision.

The hat was once more passed round.

By this time Claude's eyes had become much more familiar with the dim light which pervaded the interior of the waggon.

At first the obscurity was so great that he could scarcely distinguish the outlines of the people.

Now he could see them quite plainly, and, moreover, was able to make out all that they did.

The contributions cast into the hat were now of a much more valuable nature than before.

Every time a fresh object was dropped in, Claude nodded his head approvingly.

Presently the hat was placed in the hands of one who immediately attracted Claude's notice.

This was a young girl, upon whose thin and pallid features the marks of premature old age could be described.

She was attired in deep black, which made the ghastliness of her countenance seem more apparent.

By the peculiar cap she wore, she was proclaimed a widow.

She gazed at the hat for a moment, as Claude thought, with tearful eyes; then, with an audible sigh, she produced from a little reticule she carried a small bead purse.

There was another moment of hesitation—another deep sigh, and the little purse was dropped into the hat, which was passed on to the next passenger.

When it again reached Claude's hands, he found the weight very much increased—indeed, the booty was quite as much as he could have hoped to obtain from such a source.

To be sure, if he had searched the travellers one by one the booty would have been increased, but then Claude Duval infinitely preferred his present mode of managing the affair.

Emptying all the valuables into his capacious pockets, he made another bow, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor and the pleasure of wishing you a very good-night."

"Hark ye!" said the man who sat nearest to Claude. "You have carried things off with a very high hand, and doubtless you are mightily satisfied with what you have done; but let me tell you I have in the meantime had a very good look at your face all this time. Your features are so imprinted upon my memory that I shall never forget them, and no matter when or where I see you again, I shall know you. And what is more, should you ever be captured, as no doubt you will be, I will make my way to the court and swear this little job on to you, which will be quite sufficient to insure you a halpen collar at Tyburn."

"Thank you!" said Claude, quite calmly, though inwardly he could not help feeling a good deal of annoyance—"I am much obliged to you for your candor, and when I am captured, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing

you again. Once more, good-night, ladies and gentlemen."

The last words particularly were pronounced with a most unruflled demeanor.

At the same moment, he turned his horse's head and rode away.

Perceiving this movement, Sixteen-String Jack discontinued the guard he had been keeping over the waggoner.

"Drive on," he said, "and be quick!"

The waggoner smacked his whip; but before his heavy team had fairly got the cumbersome vehicle in motion again, the two highwaymen were a long way off down the lane.

"I'll be hanged, Claude," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, "if I did not think you never meant to bring that adventure to a conclusion! What on earth were you about to be so long? I shall expect to see a capital booty."

"You will have little to grumble at on that score, my friend. But the incident altogether was such a comical one, owing to the number of odd people who rode in the waggon, that I could not forbear lingering over it."

"I heard a great deal that passed, and could not help laughing heartily myself."

"You ought to have seen as well as heard," replied Claude, laughing at the bare recollection; but suddenly the sounds of merriment died out, and his countenance assumed an unusually grave appearance.

At the same time, very much to the surprise of his comrade, he reined in his steed.

Sixteen-String Jack of course did likewise.

Then, in a voice the tones of which well expressed his wonder, he exclaimed:

"What on earth is it, Claude—what is the matter?"

"I did not tell you, Jack," was the slow reply—"I did not tell you there was one seated in the waggon with the rest, whose years were little more than those of girlhood, who was attired in widow's weeds. Her face was pale and deeply marked with careworn lines."

"Well," said Jack, interrupting him and speaking somewhat impatiently, "what of her?"

"Why," said Claude, huskily, for the saddened face rose up vividly in his mind, "she seemed half dead with fright; and when the hat was handed to her she dropped a little bead purse into it, and as she did so she gave a heavy sigh. I do believe, Jack, that was all the wealth that she possessed."

"Why did you take it?"

"I know not; but now I bitterly reproach myself for having done so. Poor thing! I'll warrant she has had trouble enough already, without any of my causing."

"Never mind, Claude. Come on—it is past and done for."

"No, no, Jack, I feel that I cannot come on."

"Not come on?"

"No. Although I have taken the poor widow's all, it is not too late to make restitution."

"Restitution?" repeated Jack. "Do not think of anything so foolish."

"Foolish or not, I mean to take back her little purse."

"Think of the risk! We got off safely, but by this time perhaps—"

"Jack, it is quite in vain for you to urge any such considerations; I cannot—will not listen to them. Risk or no risk, that purse shall be returned."

He thrust his hand into his pocket while he spoke.

"Think again!"

"Never, for fear I might change the resolution I have come to, and which I feel to be a right one. If you do not like to accompany me in my return you need not stay where you are until I return."

"Nay, Claude, I can tell now that you are offended."

"No, but if you do not like to come—"

"Where you go I go too; if I did not, I should be unworthy of your comradeship."

"That sounds more like yourself, Jack. Come on!"

As he pronounced these last words Claude Duval turned his horse's head in the opposite direction and rode swiftly after the waggon.

At the rate he went, it was clear he would not be long in overtaking it.

On the way no further words were exchanged, although Sixteen-String Jack kept breast to breast with him.

Although he could not but condemn Claude's act as being a most imprudent one, yet Jack could not withhold his admiration of the motives which had prompted his friend to act in this manner.

In a short time the waggon appeared in sight creeping on its tedious way like some huge black snake.

"Hold!" cried Claude, at the top of his voice. "Hold, I say!"

But as the sound came from the rear, all the waggoner did was to whip his horses, for he feared nothing ~~was~~ than another attack, out of which he might not chane, to come so well as out of the last.

This was a circumstance that signified little, for Claude was soon able to overtake the slow-moving vehicle.

But even as he reached the back, some horsemen suddenly reined-up in front, and in a loud voice called upon the waggoner to stop.

"Officers, by all that's unlucky!" ejaculated Sixteen-String Jack, who at once perceived who the new-comers were.

"Impossible!"

"It is true, Claude. Fly—fly at once. That is the only chance you have of saving yourself! Fly—fly!"

"Never—at least, not until I have performed my errand!"

These proceedings occasioned a vast amount of commotion inside the waggon, the inmates of which, filled with an insatiable curiosity, drew aside the back flaps just as Claude reined-in his panting horse.

This was fortunate, as it prevented a delay, the consequences of which might have been most serious for him.

Claude knew just where the young widow was seated, so, leaning slightly forward in the saddle, he tossed the purse into her lap.

"Take it!" he cried—"take it, and keep it, and remember that it is possible for a highwayman to have as much feeling as anyone."

At the same moment, Claude drew back, or, rather, attempted to do so, for all at once he experienced a sudden check upon his movements.

The traveller seated next the end, and who had announced his intention of appearing against Claude should be ever have the opportunity of doing so, seized him by the arm with a tenacious grasp.

"Help, ho!" he cried—"help, ho! Assist me, all of you! The officers are at hand, and if we can only keep him a moment or so all will be well!"

"Fool!" said Claude Duval, as, by an exertion of the immense strength he possessed, he shook off the traveller's detaining hold. "You will tempt me too far!"

But just as he spoke Claude gave his horse the reins, and pressed him sharply on the flanks with the spur.

The animal obeyed the impulse bravely.

With one bound it cleared the low hedgerow, and afterwards flew at a tremendous rate across the long stretch of meadow land that lay before it.

Sixteen-String Jack, as the reader may make sure, was not very far behind his old ally.

It must be understood, however, that the officers, when they rode up to the waggon and hailed the driver, never suspected for an instant that those they sought were so near.

Their object in speaking to the waggoner at all was merely in order to ask him whether he had chanced to notice on the road any such persons as they required.

The bulky waggon hid the highwaymen from their view, while the clatter of their own horses' feet effectually drowned those of our two friends.

But the loud cries coming from the interior of the vehicle soon made them aware of what was amiss, though at first they were unable to credit that the highwaymen, bold as they knew them to be, could actually have the audacity to plunder the passengers in the waggon while they were by, and this, of course, not knowing the facts of the case, was just what they thought.

With a loud hue and cry, the officers set off across the fields in pursuit of their prey.

The highwaymen were fairly in sight, and their gratification was extreme accordingly.

They had come out purposely with the hope of meeting with their prey, and this success so far was much more than they had ventured to look for.

Their horses were fresh, and of the best quality they could procure.

The riders themselves were bold and determined

Under these circumstances, despite the number of their failures, they not unreasonably hoped on the present occasion to bring the chase to a successful termination.

As for the highwaymen, their danger had been so imminent and so great that, by comparison, they were now at ease.

But Sixteen-String Jack, happening soon to look back over his shoulder, perceived with what vigor their pursuers were pushing on after them.

"You must push on, Claude," he cried, "we have better taking matters too easily! Look behind you! and see how close they are."

Claude did so, and immediately increased his speed.

"What course shall you adopt to shake them off?" asked Jack, riding as close to his companion as he was able. "Have you made up your mind? It will never do for us to have them dangling at our heels all night."

"I am inclined for making one good hard push—a sudden effort. So far as I can tell, that seems to me the most likely means of shaking them off."

"It does indeed."

"Are you agreed?"

"Yes, quite."

"Then make what effort you are able."

Now the police officers had indulged themselves in the flattering but fallacious hope that the horses ridden by the highwaymen were weary.

What words, then, would suffice to paint their chagrin when they, all at once, noticed their prey start off at almost a double rate.

Already the officers had been urging their horses to the utmost of their capacity, so that the manner in which the two highwaymen shot ahead seemed alarming indeed.

The one in command of the officers could not help feeling this, and he could tell that the same might be said of his companions, for the expression of their countenances spoke plainly enough.

Wishing to encourage them as much as possible, he assumed a cheerfulness of manner that he was far from feeling as he said:

"Come, come, my lads, don't be downcast at such a trifle as this. It is only a spurt, and will soon be over, leaving their horses more exhausted than before. You have only to keep steadily on their track, and we shall have them in the long run."

If the police had not failed so very, very often, it is probable that this speech would not have been made without good effect.

As it was, the officers would not allow themselves to be much animated by it, and no wonder, for they saw the distance between them and the highwaymen was rapidly and surely increasing.

Claude and Jack certainly did push their steeds unmercifully; but they did so, believing that it would turn out the best in the long run.

The event proved that they were right.

It was shortly afterwards that Claude, looking behind him, exclaimed:

"Look back, Jack! Your eyes are much better than mine. If they can descry them now!"

"They are out of sight, surely enough; but it will not be for long—we shall soon lose what ground we have gained."

"I know that, but while they are out of our sight we can make up our minds what step to take next."

"What do you think?"

"Why, to hide will be best."

"We have no other resource. But where?"

"That is just the question. It won't do to push our horses much further at this rate; if we do, we shall knock the poor beasts up completely."

"We shall indeed."

Claude Duval took a good look around him.

"For my part," he said, at length, in a deliberate tone of voice, "I don't believe we can do better than get under cover of yonder trees. They are close at hand, and seem to form a portion of a wood of very considerable extent."

"But we must get within their shelter unseen."

"That will be easily managed if we are speedy, and if even they do suspect us of having entered the wood, it will be just like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay for them to attempt to find us."

"So it would—so it would. Push on, a couple of minutes gallop will take us fairly under the trees."



[THE HIGHWAYMEN'S ATTACK ON THE PRISONERS' VAN.]

CHAPTER MI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT INTO THE RECESSES OF THE WOOD.

As soon as the two highwaymen found themselves fairly past the border of the wood they pulled up.

"Safe and sound so far, Jack," cried Claude Duval.

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Then we ought to congratulate ourselves upon our good luck."

"Decidedly. But hark! How the wind has got up and how the darkness has increased all at once. What does it mean?"

During the excitement of the chase, the two highwaymen had failed to notice the changes which had gradually come over the face of nature.

The wind had increased from a stiff breeze to what No. 209.—BLACK BESS.

might, with scarcely any exaggeration, be called a hurricane.

This had been accompanied with dense, heavy rain-clouds, which, by the immense force of the wind, were drifted furiously across the face of the heavens.

There is no doubt that had the wind lulled but a single second they would have poured down their contents upon the earth.

But the darkness grew greater and greater every moment as more and more clouds were drifted in from windward.

"What a gust that was!" exclaimed Claude Duval, as the wind rushed and roared with terrific violence among the tree-tops.

"A gust indeed! And how dark."

"Yes; if the officers find us now, I will admit that they possess far more cunning than I give them credit for."

"Nevertheless," answered Jack, "it would be best not to make too sure."

"Decidedly."

"Then let us penetrate still further into the wood. We shall not be so exposed to the storm which I feel sure is about to break out, and we shall not be in so much danger of being seen by our foes."

Claude turned round without a word, and led the way into the recesses of the wood with as much confidence as he would had they been thoroughly well known to him.

The space between the trees was narrow, so Jack had to follow at his heels.

At last, having as they believed gone far enough to answer their purpose, Claude said:

"We will tether our horses here for awhile, Jack. It is a quiet, retired spot, and it will take them some time to recover from their late exertion."

"And in the meantime we can shelter ourselves from the storm."

"Just so."

The wind still blew with great fury among the tree-tops, but no rain fell.

Suddenly Claude Duval gripped Sixteen-String Jack tightly by the arm as he said, in a low whisper, which the angry blast made almost inaudible:

"Look—look! What is the meaning of that? Do you see? Yonder—look—look! Surely they cannot have tracked us so quickly and so well!"

"What—what?" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, who was slightly taken by surprise—"oh, what is it?"

"There—there! Surely you see now?"

"That light?"

"Yes."

Sixteen-String Jack now observed that a faint light was at some distance glimmering through the trees.

He gazed at it attentively, and so did Claude.

To both the light appeared to flit about in a most extraordinary fashion.

At one moment its light would seem to be absolutely brilliant—then the next moment it almost died away.

"What do you make of it, Claude?" asked Jack, at length.

"I am unable to form any opinion. My first idea was that it proceeded from a lantern carried by some officer."

"No, no—I scarcely think it can be that."

"Nor I now."

"Then you confess yourself puzzled?"

"I do."

"I have only one idea about it, which is, that it must be some will-o'-the-wisp. You have heard of that, have you not?"

"Yes, and seen one; but this light seems altogether different."

"It is getting further and further away."

"It has that appearance."

"I am sure of it."

"Shall we follow it?"

"If you like—we have nothing else better to occupy our time just at the present moment, and I look upon it as in some sort our duty to look closely into everything we cannot understand."

"Decidedly."

"Come on, then."

"Yes—but be silent. There is no fear that we shall be overheard, still it is always wisest to remember to be cautious."

With these words the highwaymen crept forward with stealthy steps.

In good truth this seemed like a superfluous amount of caution, for the wind was, if possible, blowing with greater violence than before, and the noise that it created among the tree tops was sufficient to drown completely every other sound.

Sixteen-String Jack happened to be first as they stood, and so he led the way, his comrade keeping close upon his heels, for the way between the trees was not wide enough to allow two to pass.

The mysterious light—for it had good claims to this designation—continued to flit about in a very remarkable and eccentric manner.

Sometimes it would disappear altogether.

Then the next moment they would see it appearing some distance off.

As they pushed still deeper and deeper into the recesses of the wood the curiosity of the highwaymen increased.

Suddenly the wind dropped.

At this instant a scud of rain, that actually seemed to have been held in suspension by the gale, fell with great violence to the earth.

It lasted only for about a couple of seconds—then the wind, as it rested by its short lull, began to blow more furiously than ever.

It so happened that the countenances of the two highwaymen were turned in such a direction that the mass of rain dashed upon them, and such was the suddenness of it that for a moment or so they were half blinded. The effect was as though a quantity of sea spray had been dashed into their faces.

But when they had succeeded in removing the moisture from their eyes and took another glance around them, the light was nowhere to be seen.

At first this occasioned them but slight surprise, and they continued to gaze around, expecting to see it start out again in some fresh quarter.

But they were disappointed.

They waited for what seemed to be a long and weary time; but they perceived no signs of the light.

"How vexatious!" cried Sixteen-String Jack.

"It has gone now for certain," replied Claude. "I begin to think it was a will-o'-the-wisp after all."

"Can you form any precise idea of the spot where it disappeared?"

"I think so."

"Then let us push on. Perhaps when we reach there we may be able to make some fresh discovery. It galls me to be baffled thus!"

Accordingly they advanced.

Before they had gone very many paces they found themselves in a small open spot that was not more than ten or twelve feet in diameter.

It was thickly surrounded by trees, which cast a deep gloom upon it.

"A strange place," remarked Claude, as he glanced around.

"Yes, and, if I am not very much mistaken, this is just where the light vanished."

"But where can it have gone?"

"I know no better than yourself."

"Hilloa! Why, there it is! Look! Can you see it?"

"Yes—quite plainly."

"Then follow it."

The light had indeed most strangely reappeared among the trees.

The highwaymen quickly quitted the enclosure; but before going many paces Claude stopped.

"Why do you halt?" asked his companion.

"Why, look! Can't you see the light is actually approaching us?"

A second glance satisfied Sixteen-String Jack that this was indeed the case.

"That is very odd," he ejaculated. "We shall soon know now the solution of the mystery."

"It seems like it."

The light most unquestionably advanced, and it was apparent that it burnt more steadily than before, although it occasionally vanished and reappeared; but this might be caused by the interposition of one of the thick-trunked trees.

"Stand back," said Claude. "The light is manifestly coming nearer. If we conceal ourselves here, we may watch it closely as it passes by."

"A good thought," replied Jack, as he at once concealed himself among the dense vegetation.

Both now bent the whole of their attention upon the approaching light.

After looking at it very steadily for some time, during which it came closer and closer, Sixteen-String Jack whispered:

"As I live, Claude, I do believe that it is some one carrying a lantern, after all."

"I should think so but for the odd, fantastic manner in which it has flitted about. What on earth object could anyone have in turning and winding about among the trees at this hour?"

"It is very strange."

"Very strange indeed. But keep quiet—perhaps we shall yet succeed in finding a solution to the mystery."

"Hush—hush!"

There was an immediate silence.

The light was now very close at hand—so close that the highwaymen could no longer doubt the correctness of their conjecture.

Moreover, there also came upon their ears at frequent intervals a rustling, crackling sound, which made itself occasionally heard above the howling of the wind.

This sound was just such a one as would be produced by a man forcing a passage through the thickly-growing forest trees.

"It is a man with a lantern," said Claude, faintly.

"What can be his errand and his purpose in wandering thus among the recesses of the forest?"

"That, I trust, we shall shortly find out, my friend."

"Hush—hush!"

"He cannot hear us—the wind roars too violently."

Nevertheless, his comrade preserved silence.

To watch the proceedings of this man sufficiently occupied their attention.

He came on with tolerable steadiness, though he swung the lantern carelessly about in his hand.

By the course he was taking, it was certain that he would pass very near the spot where our two friends had hidden themselves.

To descry what kind of looking individual he was seemed impossible, owing to the dazzling effect produced by the lantern.

At length he passed them—so closely that if the highwaymen had chosen to extend their arms they could have touched him.

Our friends held their breaths.

The man passed on, but when he gained the little open space which Claude and Jack had so recently quitted, he came to a dead stop.

"I dare not go any nearer with the light," he muttered—and the highwaymen heard him plainly, for his position was such that the wind carried all sounds from him to them—"but curse all such caution, say I! Just tell me, will you, who is likely to be watching for a light in the forest at this time of night? But here goes—anything for a quiet life!"

Having uttered these singular words, the man opened the door of the lantern, and extinguished the light.

A double darkness then seemed to reign around, but, by straining their eyes to the very utmost, the highwaymen were able to keep him in view.

He advanced a few more paces, and finally paused again at the opposite side of the clearing.

Then above the roaring of the wind there arose shrilly and clearly the sharp notes of a whistle, whose tone admirably counterfeited the cry which would be uttered by some night bird.

The whistle was repeated thrice.

Scarcely had the last notes died away than a faint gleam of light ascended into the air.

"Is that you, Drotchill?"

"Yes."

"Come down, then! Be quick with you!"

By the misty illumination which was shed around—and which appeared to emanate from some light burning beneath the surface of the earth—the highwaymen saw the form of the man more distinctly than ever.

He gradually descended till he passed out of sight, then there was a faint sound, succeeded by darkness and silence.

The two highwaymen were so much surprised—for what they beheld was something quite unexpected—that some moments elapsed before they either moved or spoke.

At last Claude said:

"Well, Jack, what do you think of that?"

"I scarcely know at present."

"Nor do I, though I have arrived at one conclusion."

"What is it?"

"Why, that the light we saw first of all was not the same as that which has just been extinguished."

"What was it, then?"

"Why, it must have been some other man. His passage through the wood may not in reality have been so devious as we imagined. Then don't you recollect that upon reaching this spot the light vanished?"

"Yes."

"Then the second light was carried by some other person approaching this self-same spot."

"No doubt you are right, Claude. I thought it odd the light should show itself again so far off and in a different direction. But still, that does not enlighten us much."

"Not very much; still, it is something."

"At any rate, there is some underground cavern hereabouts, inhabited by at least two persons."

"Yes, that much is certain."

"Then shall we rest content with possessing that amount of knowledge, or shall we try to make some further discoveries?"

"I am in favor of the latter course."

"So am I, for, who knows, it may turn out to our advantage."

"Creep forward, then, and let us try to discover the exact spot where they disappeared."

"Yes, but be cautious."

The highwaymen crept forward with great stealthiness.

Beyond their determination to discover, if possible, the entrance of the cavern, they had made no arrangements as to what else they should do, and it was quite as well, for they would have been rendered of no avail.

Suddenly, to their great surprise, the dim light showed itself again not many paces off.

The murmuring of voices could be heard.

Then, one after another, the two highwaymen, who had at once drawn back into concealment, counted fourteen men appear.

They all looked dusky and shadowy.

"Are you all here?" said a voice.

"All but old Robin."

"Then let him come forth as well, for what we have to do will require the united assistance of all of us."

CHAPTER MIL.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SUFFER THE PENALTY OF INTRUDERS.

THE man who pronounced these words spoke in an authoritative tone of voice, and stood rather aloof from the rest, his manner and bearing being clearly that of a leader.

In response to his words, one said:

"Hilloa, Robin! Come forth! You will have to quit grubbing underground for an hour or two. Come forth, you lazy old mole!"

"I'm coming," said a grumbling voice—"I'm coming! But what on earth do you want me up above for?"

"You must ask the captain if you want to know."

"Robin," said the one who had been styled captain, "you are wanted to come with us—let that much suffice."

"But the old place?"

"It must take care of itself for once. We cannot spare anyone. Make up the entrance as well as you are able, then be in readiness to follow us."

Old Robin made some grumbling reply.

After that the faint halo of light which had ascended from below, rendering these strange beings dimly visible, faded completely away.

No sooner did this happen than at a word all the men walked hurriedly off, quickly disappearing from view.

Our two friends waited until all sounds of their progress had died away, and then Claude cried:

"Fortune favors us, Jack!"

"It does indeed. That secret band have a habitation of some kind underground, and it seems to me that at the present moment all its inhabitants appear to have departed."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Then, my friend, if you feel half as curious as I do, you will not miss the opportunity of paying their stronghold a visit."

"There is only one thing—it is getting on towards daybreak, remember."

"We have some hours before us yet, and this little adventure will not occupy us for long, you may depend."

"Come on, then, I am willing."

So saying, the highwaymen quitted their place of con-

cealment, and stepped forward as well as they could judged in the direction of the opening into the cave.

"It must be somewhere near here," said Jack, as he paused and bent down towards the ground. "Yet I cannot see anything of it."

"Depend upon it, we shall have to get a light."

"Then we must be cautious in its use. Remember the light of a lantern betrayed these men to us."

"It will be easy to be as careful as they were."

With these words, Claude produced a small lantern which he invariably carried.

It was quickly ignited by means of a phosphorous match.

The lantern was provided with a condensing lens of excellent quality, and the beam of light that came from it, though small, was very brilliant.

Claude turned it so that the light fell upon the greenward, of which he was thus enabled to make an accurate examination.

But nothing whatever resembling the entrance to a cavern met his view.

"If I did not know for certain that it was somewhere close here," he said, at length, "I should begin to grow doubtful."

"So should I."

The search was continued for some moments longer, but with no better result.

"The entrance is indeed well hidden!" exclaimed Jack, in a tone of mingled vexation and admiration. "Where on earth can it be?"

"I don't know," said Claude. "Let us sit down here for a moment, and look carefully all around."

He pointed, while speaking, to the stump of a huge old tree, which projected some little distance above the ground.

There were several stumps scattered about the open space, which served to show that the clearing was an artificial one, but this was the largest of all, since it allowed the two highwaymen room to sit side by side.

There was a silence of a few seconds, and then Sixteen-String Jack observed:

"Claude, I feel certain we are as nearly as possible on the very spot where those men stood."

"So am I," was the unexpected reply; "and what is more, I believe we are at this moment much nearer the secret entrance than we have been."

"What do you mean?"

"Why," said Claude, rising to his feet again, "it is my belief we have been sitting upon it."

Sixteen-String Jack sprang quickly to his feet, for this was an idea which had not occurred to him.

"Why do you think so?" he asked. "The stump looks as natural as the rest."

"Well, we shall soon see," said Claude, kneeling down and making a rigid examination of it.

But he saw nothing.

He tried to move or shake the mass of wood, but in vain.

But he was not to be baffled very easily.

All at once, Sixteen-String Jack uttered a low cry of gratification.

"Have you found the secret?"

"I have. Look here!"

Just as he spoke, he pushed against the stump horizontally, and the result was that the upper portion slid quite away, turning freely on a kind of pivot at one side.

The reason the highwaymen had not made this discovery sooner was because they had been looking for a secret spring or fastening of some kind, whereas, the entrance had been left quite unguarded.

"That's very odd," said Claude, remarking it; "but I suppose they had no means of fastening it outside."

"No; depend upon it that is the reason. Old Robin, as they called him, was always left in charge."

The dim, misty light again rose into the air, and as soon looking down, the highwaymen perceived that it proceeded from an oil lamp that was hung many feet below them.

The construction of this covering to the cavern, though so simple, was admirably planned.

The upper portion of the stump of the old tree had been carefully sawed off, then the remaining or lower half next the ground had been as carefully hollowed out.

As we have said, the upper part had then been fitted on and secured in its place by a pivot at one side, which allowed it to turn freely.

The aperture at the top was not much larger than would suffice for the passage of a man's body; but a little way down the width materially increased.

Some rudely-cut steps were discernible.

"Here we are," said Jack, after they had both peered down for some time in silence.

"It seems quiet enough."

"As the grave."

"Let us descend, then."

"With all my heart."

"Will you go first?"

"Yes, if you like."

Jack nimbly descended.

Claude followed with the lantern.

"Wait a moment," the latter said; "perhaps there may be some kind of inner fastening; if so, the best thing we can do is to make use of it."

"Certainly."

"Just hold the light, then."

Claude was glad he thought of taking this precaution, for, upon examination, he found that there was a very strong fastening indeed, consisting of a hasp and staple, into which fitted an iron pin.

"There," said Claude, in a tone of very great satisfaction, "I shall feel much better contented, I can assure you, for I feel certain that no one can make a sudden entrance upon us. We shall have timely warning if anyone attempts to gain admittance."

"Very good," said Jack, as he cautiously descended the rude flight of steps; "but I rather think before any of that crew returns we shall be many a mile away."

Just as he spoke these words, he reached the bottom of the steps, and having done so, he paused to look about him at the strange place in which he found himself.

The oil lamp was a very primitive affair, and was suspended by means of an iron chain.

The use of this lamp was obvious.

It was placed there in order that the difficult descent of the steps might be made in safety.

Leading from the bottom step, and sloping downwards, was a kind of passage, the extremity of which was covered over with some dark substance.

Advancing, the highwaymen found this to be a kind of curtain.

As it hung there, it served the purpose of a door.

Drawing this aside, they saw before them an underground chamber, which, from the regularity of its form and the manner in which it was shored up with wooden supports, was evidently the work of human hands.

A stifling kind of heat was in this place, arising doubtless, in part, from defective ventilation, and partly from a smouldering, half-extinguished fire.

This chamber, if so we may term it, was furnished with a rude kind of table and several blocks of wood, which did duty for chairs.

On this table stood bottles and glasses, presenting an aspect of great disorder.

It seemed as though some merry-making had recently been going on.

The floor of the cavern was littered all over with objects of every description—articles by far too varied and numerous to allow of recapitulation.

"A strange place," was Jack's remark, after a silence of some minutes, during which they had been engaged in gazing upon the various objects to which we have adverted.

"Very," said Claude. "Yet there can be no doubt as to the profession of these men."

"Robbers?"

"Most certainly, and, I will warrant, of the worst sort, accompanying all they do with deeds of ruthless, needless violence."

"What makes you think so?"

"The aspect of this place, and the fact that so many are banded together. They are arrant cowards, every one of them, I'll warrant."

"Let us come a little closer and make a better examination. I am inclined, however, to think you are quite right."

"I am sure of it."

The highwaymen now advanced into the cavern; but

they did not find within it anything more than they had already noted.

On the opposite side, however, they came to a crevice in the wall, that was protected by a door, ~~and~~ so far in as to be at first invisible.

"Now, then, Jack," cried Claude, "the light!"

The door yielded to a touch.

Crossing the threshold, the highwaymen found themselves in another cavern, much smaller than the first, but stored up with a great number of small packages, doubtless containing articles of value.

There was another door close at hand, leading into another cavern; but this was perfectly empty.

"Snug quarters, truly," observed Jack, as they returned to the outer chamber, "and it is certainly too bad that they should be occupied by such a crew as hold possession of them."

"Have you seen enough?"

"Yes," was the reply, given in a lingering tone, and with a reluctant glance around.

"Then let us be going. Time is flying past; and this close atmosphere is disgusting to me."

Without waiting to hear what more his companion might have to say upon the subject, Claude led the way to the flight of steps.

He ascended them as rapidly as he was able.

Jack followed more slowly at his heels.

The iron pin was withdrawn from the staple, the hasp removed, and Claude, with a sigh of satisfaction, was about to push the covering away, when, to his dismay, he heard a voice close to him exclaim:

"What the devil is the matter with the trap? It's d—d odd that it should be fast. There cannot be anyone below? I'll try again."

What was Claude to do?

It was too late to refasten the hasp and staple. Moreover, if there had been time for him to do so it would have been of no avail—they would have been like rats in a trap.

Jack overheard what was said, and luckily decided on the right course to adopt.

"Down, Claude—down! Leave the door—we must hide!"

Even while he uttered these words in a suppressed voice, yet quite loudly enough to reach his comrade's ears, he descended the steps with the utmost precipitation.

Claude heard the individual above endeavoring to remove the trap.

A kind of instinct made him follow in Jack's footsteps.

The cavern was quickly reached, and then both gave a hasty glance around them in search of some place of concealment.

But at first none presented itself.

Footsteps were heard upon the stairs.

"Where shall we hide?" asked Claude.

"I see no other place than this. Be quick, and all will yet be well!"

Sixteen-String Jack, as he spoke, placed his hand upon a large barrel which was standing upon end in one corner.

It had evidently served for a seat, and as there was a large bung-hole at the side, it was quite clear that it was perfectly empty.

"Do you mean inside?"

"Yes."

"But there is not room for two."

"There is another barrel yonder, of similar appearance. Quick—quick! If you stay to utter another word, we shall be lost!"

About this there could be no doubt, for the sound of a footstep could be heard just outside the covered doorway.

Sixteen-String Jack at once crept into his hiding-place, and Claude, who had not yet recovered from his bewilderment, hastened to do the same.

They were only just in time.

Scarcely had the barrels been settled into something like their former position than the curtain was drawn aside with an impatient hand.

It was rather strange, our two friends thought, that the man should have been so long in making his appearance; but the fact was that he had stopped to carefully secure the trap-door in its place.

The delay was most fortunate for the highwaymen; without it they could not have escaped discovery.

Upon entering, this man paused and stood near the threshold.

The two highwaymen were able to observe his movements with ease and precision by placing their eyes close to the bung-holes, which, as we have said, were in the sides of the barrels.

The re-crower looked about him for some moments with a suspicious air.

But the quietude of the place appeared to reassure him.

He passed his hands once or twice before his eyes.

Then spoke.

"It's d—d odd!" he said; "but I could have sworn that when I tried the first time the trap-door was fastened. And yet it could not have been, for it yielded easily the next time I tried. I must have bungled. My brain feels strange and dizzy. I have not had enough—certainly not enough. I want more brandy to steady my nerves."

From off a small shelf at one side of the cavern the man took a bottle, which without a moment's hesitation he placed to his lips.

A loud gurgling sound followed, and from the length of time which this continued it was evident that a great quantity was imbibed.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "I feel better now; and yet if I did not know that was the best spirit to be had, I should declare it to be no better than water. Bah! but I am better—much better!"

Claude and Jack had thought it strange that the man's suspicions about the fastened door had very quickly been allayed; but now it was accounted for by the fact that he was some distance gone in intoxication, yet not so far as to prevent him knowing what he was about, or to incapacitate him for action.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ARE WITNESSES OF SOME VERY SINGULAR SCENES BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE.

To speak the honest truth, Sixteen-String Jack, now that he found himself ensconced in a comfortable hiding-place, felt rather pleased than otherwise with the turn affairs had taken.

Although his attention was fully occupied in watching all the movements of the man, yet each moment he recovered more and more his usual self-possession.

With something like sensations of perfect composure, he noted that this man had nothing peculiar enough in his dress to make him conspicuous among his fellow-creatures.

As to his countenance, that was about as hideous and repulsive as a countenance well could be and yet reserve some traits of humanity about it.

Jack anxiously wondered who he could be, and what was the errand that had brought him back there alone.

Beyond all doubt, patience and the progress of time would give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

"Now, to complete my work," the man muttered, "I have got rid of them all; and what is more, without exciting any suspicions against myself. But I must make the best use of my time. It is lucky that I have so little left to do."

With these words on his lips, the man opened the door communicating with the cavern where our friends had noticed so many articles stored up.

Making use of the utmost expedition, this man rapidly carried out the various packages, and stored them in the contiguous chamber that had been so recently explored by the highwaymen.

This labor he continued for a great length of time, so long that the two watchers grew tired of observing him.

There was one discovery, however, which both made, and almost at the same moment.

This was that this man was no other than the one who had assumed the manner of a leader among those outside, and who had uttered his commands in so peremptory a voice.

It was strange that he should be there alone, and under circumstances of so much mystery.

One inference could only be drawn, which was, that he

was engaged in doing something which, for particular reasons, he wished to keep secret from his companions.

Such an act must be one of a villainous character—at least, that was Jack's assumption, and he determined to do his best to prevent its consummation.

Claude Duval, on the other hand, felt fidgety and uneasy.

He was sure, from the length of time that had elapsed, that dawn could not be far distant, and he had wished to return to the ruins.

Clearly, however, it was too late to think of doing this now.

Then there was no knowing how long he might be detained by this man and his associates, and he looked forward to remain cooped up under the barrel for an indefinite period with anything like pleasure.

There was no help for it, however, and this knowledge, so far from enabling him to become reconciled to his position, only made him chafe the more.

In the meanwhile, the robber captain—for such Sixteen-String Jack had designated him—proceeded steadily with his task until he had completed it.

This was not until what seemed to the highwaymen a long and weary time had passed—how long they were unable to form any definite idea.

"At last," he murmured, with a heavy sigh of relief, as he sank down and wiped the perspiration from his face—"at last the task is completed. Now I am in readiness, let them come when they choose."

He waited for a short time as if to recover himself; then, having closed both the doors and restored the place to its ordinary appearance, he entered the passage, ascended the steps, and, so far as our friends were able to judge, pushed open the trap-door and went outside.

For some moments our friends remained perfectly silent, listening intently.

But Claude, whose impatience had in no degree abated, at length said, in a faint whisper:

"Jack."

"Yes, Claude?"

"Has he gone?"

"I think so."

"Then let us go too."

"That would be most unwise. We may be only waiting just above. Consider that by this time it is daylight."

"Yes, confound it, I have no doubt it is!"

"You seem vexed."

"Yes, I cannot look forward with anything like calmness to remaining here for perhaps twelve or fourteen hours."

"It will be irksome; but, then, as it is impossible to return, and as the day must be spent in some place or other, I think we cannot do better than remain here. In all probability we shall be quite safe."

"I should prefer being above ground."

"I don't know that I should."

"You seem to like your quarters."

"Not particularly; but I have a presentiment that if we only remain we shall see and hear something well worth witnessing."

"Then, if that is your impression, I will reconcile myself to remaining."

"Hush—hush!"

There was instant silence.

After a short pause, Jack spoke again.

"I thought I heard him returning," he whispered, "but it must have been my fancy. How lucky it was we escaped down the steps so well as we did!"

"Most lucky! I can scarcely understand how it was the fellow did not discover us."

"He is in a state of great excitement—that is true; and, if I am any judge of matters, I should give my deliberate opinion that this man meditates an act of more than ordinary atrocity."

"But of what nature?"

"There I confess I am in the dark. We must watch closely the course of events."

"And what do you think of doing?"

"Interfering, if I can see my way clear to so doing."

"Well, Jack, my friend, I will not say to you one word of my private thoughts, simply because they are in entire opposition to yours. But it is quite clear that you have set your heart upon seeing this little drama

played out, and therefore I will not attempt to balk you."

"I shall avail myself of your generosity of spirit, Claude, and I am moved to do so because I feel more strongly than ever that you will have no cause to regret having done so."

"Very well, Jack—I resign myself entirely. You will excuse me, however, for just mentioning one thing."

"What is that?"

"Can you tell me how we are to make our exit from this place when you feel that we have stayed here long enough?"

"I have not thought about that, Claude."

"I fancied not."

"And, what is more, I believe it would be foolish to think of it, because we cannot possibly tell what extraordinary turn events may take. At any rate, if we find here a day's safe shelter, that will be something to feel satisfied about."

"So it will. Yet I could have wished for more comfortable quarters."

"It is the barrel you don't like, Claude?"

"I confess it."

"Well, then, as this fellow seems to have sought the upper earth we may venture to emerge. It will be more comfortable than remaining cooped up, and when we hear him returning there will be plenty of time for us to conceal ourselves again."

"I was thinking so, but was in doubt whether it would be prudent."

But Claude hesitated no longer, for he lifted the barrel to one side and crept out.

Jack did the same.

Their first act was to hasten to the curtained doorway.

They listened a moment or so, and convinced themselves that the man had really passed out at the trap-door.

And now really one would have thought the wisest course that the highwaymen could possibly have adopted would be to have taken advantage of the present opportunity to get away from such close and uncomfortable quarters.

By remaining they ran a thousand and one risks.

But Jack would not think of any one of them.

It was decidedly a comfort to be freed from the cask, and they stretched themselves every now and then, as if rejoicing in their liberty.

Their conversation was not sufficiently to the point to be worth placing before the reader—it consisted chiefly in speculations as to what was likely to be the termination of what they had witnessed.

In this manner the whole day passed—not that they were able to tell anything about light or darkness by absolute observation, but Claude happened all at once to recollect that he had a watch in his pocket.

They remained, then, quite undisturbed until close upon the verge of midnight.

Then a faint, grating sound reached their ears.

It was produced by the removal of the cleverly-concocted trap-door.

No sooner did the sound strike upon their ears than our friends hastened to regain their respective places of shelter.

This was quickly done, but, although they were so rapid in their movements, they had scarcely settled themselves before some one entered.

The noise which now became audible informed them that the whole of the gang had in all probability come back.

Our friends at first rather shrank back, but gaining confidence after the lapse of a few moments, they looked through the bungs.

Among the rest, they quickly caught sight of the leader, who looked more flushed and excited than usual.

In a voice that sounded high and unnatural, as though he was endeavoring to conceal feelings which would be betrayed by the tones of his voice, he said:

"Gallant comrades, are we all here?"

This question caused everyone to glance in the countenance of the one who happened to be standing next to him.

Then followed a unanimous

"Yes!"

"Good! And is the trap-door above secured?"

"Yes, captain."

"Is that you, old Robin?"

"It is."

"And you have fastened it?"

"I have."

"Then we need not be much afraid of being disturbed. Seat yourselves, my gallant comrades—seat yourselves once more around this board, which has witnessed so many of our meetings. Come, come—be quick. As you know, we have much before us to-night."

"What the deuce," Jack asked himself, "can it be all about?"

Consequent upon these words from their captain, the men assembled themselves round the table, choosing for seats whatever movable object came nearest to hand.

And now our friends found themselves threatened with a great danger, because it was altogether unlooked for.

One man walked deliberately up to the barrel beneath which Jack was concealed, and placed his hands upon it, in order to roll it up to the table.

Jack considered all was over.

But a feather will serve to turn a balance.

If the man had actually moved the cask, Jack's presence must infallibly have been discovered.

At the very moment that he stooped, however, the captain called out:

"Don't roll that great lumbering thing up to the table; see, there are plenty of seats without that!"

With a grumbling sound, the man rose again.

What a long-drawn breath of relief Jack gave!

It was about as narrow an escape from discovery as anyone well could have.

Little dreaming what had been the consequence of his speech, the captain, with a kind of forced hilarity, invited the men to seat themselves around the table.

They complied, and in a short time something resembling order was obtained.

Several bottles were placed upon the table, containing wines and spirits of every variety.

Glasses were rapidly filled and emptied, and at length the captain rose to his feet and glanced down the table at the two rows of ferocious-looking faces.

There was a general silence.

"My gallant comrades," said the captain, "let me, first of all, drain a bumper to the good luck that has attended us in our late enterprises."

The bumper, without the least hesitation, was drained with enthusiasm.

In fact, the men seemed as though they were quite inclined to drink upon the least pretext or provocation.

"Now, then, friends all," the captain resumed, "according to our usual custom, let the proceeds be produced. I will set you the example."

So saying, he took from his pockets a considerable quantity of gold coin, which he placed in a heap on the table before him.

No sooner had he finished, than those around him followed his example.

In the space of a few moments the table was covered with an immense amount of money, which was roughly made up into one great heap.

"Is not that a glorious sight, my comrades? Have we not had a slice of luck?"

Various murmurs escaped the lips of the men—apparently murmurs of dissatisfaction.

It was evident the captain took them for such, for he cried:

"What—what! do I hear grumbling? Who could find fault with such a night's work as this? What do you all mean? Speak, somebody! Let me know what is passing in your minds. Remember, no concealments is our rule."

Some whispering followed this speech, and then one of the men, with the common consent of his fellows, said:

"Captain, it is because we are satisfied, not dissatisfied, with our night's work that we grumble."

The captain opened his eyes wide with astonishment.

"Because you are satisfied?"

"Yes. You seem surprised. But it is because we see what can be done if we remain together, that makes us dislike agreeing to your proposition. Now it's out,

and I hope you will not be offended, captain, but that you will think twice before you act."

The captain's countenance was fully revealed to Sixteen-String Jack, who noticed that there came over it an awful and ominous change.

It would seem as though the captain himself was conscious that his face betrayed the state of his mind, so, to conceal it, he poured out a glass of brandy and held it to his lips.

But Jack noticed that his hand trembled so excessively that much of the brandy was spilt.

But of this fact the captain either was, or affected to be, unconscious.

The men sat in what seemed to be a sullen silence.

They were evidently waiting in great anxiety for the captain to speak.

"Th—" had not long to wait.

CHAPTER MIV.

IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN FINDS THERE IS SUCH A THING AS RETRIBUTION EVEN IN THIS WORLD.

THE captain, still holding the glass of brandy in his hands, rose deliberately to his feet.

"My comrades," he said, glancing all around him, "I am not altogether surprised at your feelings in one respect. But in another I am. I quite thought that this business had been so far settled as to need no further discussion, but simply a few plain statements from myself. What say you?"

There was a silence.

"Then," said the captain, after a brief pause, "I shall take your silence for consent. What I have to say, then, is this: We have carried on our little transactions for a long time in perfect immunity. We numbered twenty at the first, but one after another your companions have in various ways been removed from you."

The captain moistened his mouth with some brandy, for he spoke with difficulty.

"I need scarcely remind you of the terms of our association: We were to remain banded together for a certain time for the general good, then at the last all which we had was to be equally divided and the association dissolved.

"The time has now come, but at the very last moment it seems to me some of you are inclined to raise disputes. Once for all, I will not listen to them; the general safety compels the adoption of the plan I laid before you."

The excitement under which the captain labored visibly increased.

To what point his remarks were about to tend, or what would be the upshot of the whole affair, the highwaymen could not, for the life of them, imagine, and this made them look on with redoubled instead of diminished interest.

"It is not necessary to tell you that we have been surprisingly successful, and I have no doubt many of you think that the association can be carried on for a much longer period to our mutual advantage."

There was a general murmur of:

"We do—we do!"

"That is just what I thought, but let me assure you it is an error—a fatal error; and what is more, if we were to adopt it we should lose what we have already, instead of gaining more. No, no, take my word for it, the scheme has been carried on quite as far as will be safe. After to-night, any attempt to prolong it will end in destruction."

There was a whispered conference among the men, and then one said:

"Well, captain, you know very well by the terms of our agreement that we are bound to obey you. We have always done so, and don't intend to break through a good rule now."

"That is well!" cried the captain, trying hard to stifle the sigh of relief that rose to his lips.

"But," said the man who had hitherto served as a mouthpiece for the expression of the opinions of his comrades, "after this association is dissolved, I suppose there is nothing to prevent those of us who choose to do so forming another association of a similar character?"

"None whatever," cried the captain—"none whatever—only bear in mind no persuasion will induce me to join you."

This announcement was received with silence.

Then, with a resumption of all that excitement and nervousness which had previously characterised his words and movements, the captain said:

"A few words now will have to pass between us. The time has come for the wealth which has been accumulated to be divided amongst you all. That shall be done at once. You have all helped to pack this wealth up into a portable shape—all except this gold on the table, which remains to be divided. It was placed in yonder inner cavern, as you all well know."

So saying, the captain pointed to the door communicating with the smaller cavern, in which our friends had seen so many parcels packed up, all of which, it must be understood, had been most carefully removed by the captain on the preceding night, or rather morning.

"When you are ready," continued the captain, "rise and go, all of you, to the door, bring forth the wealth, and let it be divided."

With surprising alacrity all the men rose to their feet in perfect readiness on this occasion to obey their captain's commands.

A grim smile came over the latter's countenance as he observed it.

In a dense throng they stood together, as if waiting for the captain to lead the way.

But he hung back, pretending to be very busy with a small hand-lantern which he carried.

"Go on, my friends," he cried, in quavering tones—"go on. There is no need for you to hold back for me. Go on. Be quick, and bring forth the wealth."

Still keeping in a body, the men advanced to the door which had been indicated.

They threw it open on its hinges and entered.

No sooner had the last one crossed the threshold than the door closed.

Then the captain, who had been stooping down, flung himself flat on his face.

There was a flash of light—

A dull, heavy, roaring sound like thunder—

Blows—cries—groans—another roar—then silence.

Silence and darkness.

The highwaymen were stunned and bewildered.

The barrels in which they had concealed themselves were overturned, and hurled with great violence against the walls of the cavern.

Upon recovering possession of their senses, Jack was about to call aloud to his comrade, when fortunately he was arrested by hearing a voice exclaim:

"It is done—the deed is done! At last—at last all—is over! Dull fools never to suspect me! But that is over now. I will get together all these valuables, and depart. Then, sleeping or waking, I will try to forget that there is, or ever was, such a place as this. How the powder roared. Well—well, I will not think of it. Why should I? It did its work effectually and well. They are dead—all dead—every one perished, and so there is no one who can contest my claim to the whole. Ha, ha! This is indeed a good night's work, and yet why should I feel so nervous? Why should my flesh crawl, and the blood seem to turn cold in my veins? It is all fancy! I must, and will get the better of it! It is impossible for one of them to be alive."

By the time the man had done giving utterance to these ejaculations, Sixteen-Sting Jack was able to arrive at a tolerably correct conclusion respecting what had happened.

Much that had been obscure to him before was now made clear.

He guessed at once what would be an awful punishment to this treacherous monster.

Placing his hands in a peculiar manner before his mouth, he gave utterance to a most awful groan.

It was echoed by a shriek of dismay.

"Mercy—mercy!" cried the captain—"have mercy upon me! Is it possible that some one has escaped with life?"

Jack groaned again—this time more awfully than before. The captain seemed to fall down on his face.

To him the intense darkness that prevailed had a thousand terrors.

His imagination peopled it with all manner of hideous things, and it is no exaggeration to say that in a few moments he suffered whole ages of torment.

Claude Duval had been dashed down with greater force than his companion, for he appeared to be much nearer to the doorway.

Consequently, it was some time before he recovered possession of his senses.

He did so with Jack's first groan ringing in his ears.

Puzzled and bewildered, he remained perfectly still for a moment, not able to comprehend exactly where he was or what had happened.

Then came the second groan.

Recollection then rushed full upon him.

His first thought was for his companion's safety.

"Jack—Jack," he cried, "where are you? Speak—speak! Are you much hurt?"

The captain heard these words.

His terrors increased, for the impression came over him that his deliberate plan of wholesale murder had by some mysterious means or other completely failed, as in his agitation he did not notice that Claude's voice was a strange one.

"Help—help!" he gasped—"help and save me! No—it is useless to ask for mercy—I must escape! If needs be, I must fight my way to freedom! No mercy—no mercy!"

Jack guessed at once what were the captain's feelings, and hastened to take advantage of the circumstance.

"Villain!" he cried, at the very top of his voice, "you shall receive the reward due to such atrocity as yours! It will be in vain for you to attempt to escape—you are doomed!"

With a wild shriek of terror, which proclaimed the fearful condition of his mind, the captain sprang to his feet and made a frantic dash across the cavern.

Jack heard him, and felt certain that he had gone in the direction of the steps.

Fearful that his knowledge of the intricacies of the cavern would enable him to escape—a thing which Jack was most anxious to prevent—our friend cried:

"Hold—hold, villain that you are! If you attempt to move another step your death will be certain!"

But his words were disregarded.

The captain was struggling furiously with the curtain which obstructed his progress, and which, for the life of him, owing to the state of mortal fright he was in, he could not dash aside.

"Hold!" cried Jack, again groping his way through the darkness—"hold, or I fire!"

But the captain gave a cry of delight.

The curtain was now torn down, and he was now hurrying towards the steps.

Guided by the sound only, Jack raised his pistol and fired.

There was a tremendous report, which caused numberless fragments of earth to fall to the floor of the cavern—fragments which had been detached by the explosion.

Then came an awful cry that rang with terrific effect through the cavern.

It was a cry such as Claude and Jack hoped never to hear again.

It was followed by a heavy, crashing noise.

"Claude—Claude!"

"Yes, Jack?"

"Where are you?"

"Here—here."

"Quick—a light!"

"In a moment. Are you unhurt?"

"Yes, quite."

A momentary delay, which seemed almost like an age, took place.

Then there was a faint glimmering of light.

Claude quickly had his lantern lighted.

Then, advancing, he held it up.

The first object upon which its beams fell was the haggard countenance of his companion.

"Why, Jack," he exclaimed, "you look as though you had seen a ghost!"

"No matter—no matter," was the impatient answer.

"Give me the light, and follow me. This way—this way!"

Guided as much as anything by a succession of awful groans, the two highwaymen made their way across the cavern.

Upon reaching the kind of passage leading from it, a most horrible sight presented itself.



[TOM DAVIS IS OVERCOME WITH GRATITUDE.]

Lying in a strange, huddled-up mass, and literally bathed in blood, was the man who had been styled captain.

Jack's bullet had told fearfully.

But without any great stretch of the imagination, it would be easy to believe that the bullet had been guided by some retributive power that was unwilling to allow such a monster to escape.

At any rate, there he lay, bleeding profusely, his eyes almost starting from his head with horror.

It would seem that at the time when he was struck by the bullet he was in the act of ascending the rude flight of steps.

It was either that, or else, directly after the infliction of the wound, he had staggered and attempted to descend—

Then fallen headlong back.

Jack turned the light of the lantern full upon him.

No. 210.—BLACK BEAR.

After the first glance, however, he was compelled to avert his eyes.

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the captain, in a feeble voice.

"Oh, have mercy upon me! I was tempted—yes, sorely tempted to do this deed; and you see how I have been punished!"

"You are past our help," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but you have brought death upon your own head."

"I know it—I know it, and rejoice in the knowledge that at the most I have only a few minutes to exist. After this night, life would be a greater punishment to me than I could bear."

"I meant not to slay you," said Jack; "my intention was merely to put a stop to your escape."

"And you have done it. But ah! who are you? Strangers—yes, strangers, for although the mist of death is thick before my eyes, yet I am sure that I never saw you before."

It was strange that the captain had not made this discovery sooner.

"Yes, we are strangers," said Jack, "but, beyond saying that, I do not intend to give you any information."

"I do not want it—I do not want it! I fancy, too, that there is little need for me to tell you what is the meaning of all that has occurred."

"I think we comprehend it pretty fully."

"I had laid my plans well—yes, exceedingly well. All went well to the last—quite well; then I—I—I——"

He gasped painfully several times for breath.

But at each effort to recover the wonted action of his lungs, he grew palpably weaker and weaker, until, after a long-drawn sigh, he expired.

After this there was a momentary silence.

It was broken by Sixteen-String Jack, who simply exclaimed:

"He is dead!"

"Yes, quite dead," said Claude, touching the bleeding mass with the toe of his riding-boot. "Now let us get to the upper air; this place stifles me."

He pushed forward as he spoke; but Jack cried:

"Hold—hold, my friend! You forget."

"Forget what?"

"Why, it is just within the bounds of possibility that some of this man's companions may have escaped the effects of this explosion; if so, it is clearly no more than our duty, bad as they are, to render them what assistance lies in our power."

This was something which Claude could not dispute.

He turned back, though somewhat reluctantly.

Jack led the way with a rapid step across the cavern, and paused at the door, or rather where the door had been.

The doorway was now filled up with earth, and a little examination seemed to show them that the force of the explosion had caused the roof and side of the inner cavern to fall in.

Therefore if any of those unfortunates who entered it had happened to escape from the explosion they must have been buried under many tons of earth.

"We can do no good here," cried Jack; "they are past our help."

"Hark!"

Both listened.

But the silence of the very grave itself reigned around them.

"All is over," said Jack—"all is over. But what an awful slaughter!"

He shuddered as he spoke, and turned to leave the cavern.

Claude hastily followed him.

As he did so, his eye fell upon the pile of glittering gold, which, strangely enough, had remained undisturbed.

"What shall be done with this?" he asked.

"Nothing—at least, nothing just at present. Like you, I feel sick and faint. Some other time perhaps——"

Jack ceased abruptly, for just at that moment a death-like feeling came over him.

With an effort, he shook it off, however, and managed to stagger across the cavern.

The steps were ascended with still greater difficulty; but at last the top was reached, the strange covering was removed, and then, with a sensation of most indescribable and inexpressible relief, the highwaymen found the fresh breath of heaven blowing in their faces.

CHAPTER MV.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MEET WITH A SINGULAR INCIDENT AT THE ROADSIDE INN.

FOR some moments Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack literally seemed to do nothing but drink in the cold night air.

No words can describe how welcome and refreshing it was to their panting lungs.

"Thank Heaven, Jack," said Claude Duval, "that we are safely out of that place! It will be some time before I feel inclined to burrow underground again, I rather think!"

"It has been an awful see e. Would—oh, would that

I could have guessed at the intentions of that monster! It is terrible to think that so many have perished."

"Well, Jack, you may think so."

"Do not you?"

"I cannot exactly say I do. They were a very bad lot indeed—that is quite certain; and we may be sure that, if they had lived, every one would have come to some bad end or other."

"That may be, and yet——"

"Do not waste time to speak of them. Are you better?"

"Much."

"Then, my friend, if you will be guided by me, you will do your best to recover possession of our horses, and after that we will make our way back to the castle."

"I shall be ready in a few moments, but I cannot so readily banish from my mind the remembrance of this affair. Besides, before we leave we ought to take accurate note of the exact position of this place, so that, should it ever be necessary, we can find it again."

"I don't think there will be much difficulty about that."

Sixteen-String Jack looked well around him, so as to imprint every feature of the place upon his mind, then glanced upwards to note the position of the stars.

"I shall know it again," he said. "But the gold which was upon the table—what about it, Claude?"

"If you ask me, I should say let it remain where it is. What would it be worth, think you, to encounter that dreadful scene again?"

Jack was silent.

"My opinion is," continued Claude, "that the best thing we can do is to lay all the facts before the captain when we return, and hear what he has to say upon the subject."

"Agreed, then. There are many things connected with the affair which I should much like to have cleared up. But I suppose we can do no more than indulge in speculations?"

"Nothing; but, for all that, I feel tolerably certain that we shall come somewhere very near the truth."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. These men have been in the habit for some time past of committing depredations. The booty was brought here. At first, no doubt, it was intended that all should be fairly and equally divided, but the spirit of avarice came in and took a lodging in the captain's breast. That led him to the deed he perpetrated to-night."

"Yes, that must be so."

"He must have availed himself of various opportunities to lay a mine beneath that small cavern, in which, of course, his companions, when they entered it, believed the booty was stored."

"He must have made some excuse to them to get away from them during some part of their last expedition."

"Yes, and all the rest is clear. As soon as all were standing in the treacherous inner cavern, he applied his light to the train of gunpowder. That, it seems to me, is the long and the short of the whole affair."

"But how awful!"

"Truly so."

Sixteen-String Jack sat still for some time in perfect silence.

At length rising and giving a parting glance around him, he exclaimed:

"Come, Claude, let us go. But, like you, I think I shall be most reluctant to visit this place again."

Without another word, the two highwaymen set out in quest of their horses.

As may be imagined, it was no easy task for them to retrace their steps among the trees, for not the slightest trace remained to show them the track by which they had come.

They soon discovered, too, that the wood was of a much greater extent than they had at first imagined it to be, and the trees were all so much alike that they began to fear their search was a hopeless one.

Suddenly, however, Claude paused and exclaimed:

"Hark, Jack—did you hear that?"

"Yes, quite plainly. It was a neigh, and of course from one of our horses. We must be close to them now."

"Have you a good idea of the direction from which the sound proceeded?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Lead the way, then."

Jack stepped forward with a tolerable amount of confidence, and, after a brief search, the eyes of the two highwaymen were gladdened by the sight of their steeds.

They were standing just as they had left them, having made apparently no effort to break their tether.

Taking them by the bridles, our friends led them towards the borders of the wood.

From the length of time that had elapsed, and from the fact that their horses had not been discovered, there seemed little to fear that the officers were still on the look-out for them.

No doubt when they once discovered that the highwaymen had fairly gained the recesses of the wood, or forest—for it seemed more like the latter than the former—they gave up the chase in despair.

Nevertheless, Claude and Jack did not venture to quit the protecting shadow of the trees until they had satisfied themselves by reconnoitring that there was no one lurking about.

The darkness prevented them from executing their task with any amount of exactness, still the darkness was in their favor, for it would serve to keep their forms concealed.

"I think we may venture," said Jack; "there does not seem to be anyone about."

"The coast seems perfectly clear," replied Claude. As he spoke he at once rode out into the waste ground with which the wood was engirdled.

"The night is already far spent," exclaimed Jack. "I think now our wisest course will be to make our way back to the ruins where, doubtless, Dick and the rest are waiting for us with great anxiety."

"That is exactly what I was about to propose."

"Push on, then. Our horses, after their long rest, ought to be able to make tolerable speed."

Having uttered these words, the two highwaymen without further delay set their steeds in motion, and soon were stretching across the open country in the direction of their destination.

During the time, however, that they had remained concealed in the cavern much rain had fallen, and they soon discovered that the heavy, soddened nature of the ground taxed their horses' powers most severely.

Presently they pulled up, and with some abruptness, for they saw that a ploughed field of vast extent lay before them.

"It will never do to attempt to take them across there, Claude," said Jack—"it would knock them up completely."

"You are right, it would; even now they show signs of great exhaustion."

"What is to be done?"

"I fancy the best thing will be to keep along under this hedge until we meet with a lane or cross-country road. Rely upon it, we shall not have to go far before finding one."

The direction of their horses' heads was now changed, and at a much slower rate than before, they journeyed on. Our friends found their anticipations well founded.

Ere they had gone much more than half a mile they found themselves near a narrow winding lane.

It was separated from them, however, by a tall, stout wooden fence, the top of which was garnished with a great quantity of rusty iron hooks.

Claude and Jack shook their heads at this obstruction. It would not only be foolish but cruel to make their horses face such an obstacle, as in case it should not be cleared very serious injuries would be the result.

"We must look for a gate," said Claude. "It will never do to try such a rasper as that while our horses are in this exhausted condition."

"There is no occasion for the attempt to be made, I think," replied Jack, "for unless my eyes deceive me I can see a gate a little way down yonder."

Claude looked in the direction to which his companion pointed, and cried:

"Yes, there is a gate, sure enough. We are all right now."

Upon the gate being reached, however, it was found to be very strongly and carefully secured by means of a padlock and a stout iron chain.

Claude was unprovided with any materials requisite for removing such an obstacle as this, but he dismounted quickly, for his eye happened to light upon a large round stone at least as large as his own head.

Raising this with both his hands, he flung it against the gate.

A sharp crash was the result, and upon examining the padlock afterwards it was found to be completely demolished.

The gate swung open, and Claude rapidly remounted. Neither had a very good idea of where this lane was likely to take them, for to the best of their knowledge they had never been in it before.

After a brief consideration, however, they turned to the right.

For some time they rode on rapidly and in silence, for the ground beneath their horses' feet was good, showing that the lane was well cared for.

Passing round rather a sharp curve, they came in sight very suddenly of the high-road.

Mechanically they drew rein and looked around.

The first thing that attracted their notice was a building situated just at the spot where the lane joined the highway.

A second glance at it made them aware that the building was an inn.

Having made this discovery, they rode forward with greater cautiousness than ever.

Lights were shining from most of the windows on the ground-floor, showing that the inmates had not yet retired to rest, or, what was more likely, that they had just risen, for the hour was that dark one which is popularly supposed invariably to precede the dawn.

Seeing that the inhabitants of the roadside inn were astir, Claude said:

"What say you, Jack, to halting here for a few moments? There cannot be much risk in doing so, and our horses will be all the better for a little refreshment."

"They are sorely in need of it; and I feel that nothing would be so welcome to my lips as a tankard of good home-brewed ale."

"We are very likely to get it here. No doubt they are up at this early hour to be in readiness for one of the coaches passing by."

"No doubt that is it. Come, I can see there is a horse-trough in front. We have no time to spare, but yet our halt here will not prove any loss of time."

With this understanding the two highwaymen guided their horses to the front of the inn.

No sooner did they pause than a man made his appearance from round an angle of the building.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "are you going to favor me with a call?"

"No, I think not," answered Claude. "But if you will bring us a tankard of your best ale, and while we are drinking it supply the horses with something eatable that they can amuse themselves with while we drink it, I shall be obliged."

"Your instructions shall be carried out, gentlemen. But, excuse me, I have no stable accommodation at disposal; but if you like to let your horses stand round the corner for a few minutes with the rest, they can have what they require, and you can step indoors the while and warm yourselves, for it is 'nation cold.'"

"It is indeed," said Jack, shivering, "but we are in too great a hurry."

"You know best, gentlemen, so wait half a moment while I attend to you."

"That must be the landlord, I should think," observed Jack, as the man bustled into the house.

"What horses did he mean?" asked Claude. "I have a great mind to have a look."

Just then there seemed to be a great commotion all at once within the public-house, and in a second afterwards several individuals rushed forth.

Our friends did not need to give a second glance to recognise them.

They were police officers.

"Off and away, Jack!" cried Claude Dravay, for he perceived at once that they were known.

It was a great disappointment to be disturbed at this moment, but they thought not of it.

Wheeling their horses round with great suddenness, they set off at a full gallop along the road.

As they passed the angle of the inn from where the landlord had appeared, the highwaymen caught sight of the horses belonging to the officers, which were standing with their heads turned to the wall, and eating away at a great rate.

"What a narrow escape!" cried Jack.

"Yes—yes! But push on—push on! We must get clear of them at once, or we shall take them too near the castle."

Jack felt this, and spurred his horse hard.

For one thing, they had obtained a good start, for as yet their enemies had not begun the chase.

Jack glanced back again, and as he did so he uttered a loud laugh, for a most amusing spectacle met his gaze.

Claude turned round and laughed heartily as well.

Still they did not linger, and the next moment a curve in the road hid the inn from their sight.

To explain what Jack saw, it is necessary to go back a little.

These officers, then, were no others than those who had made such strenuous efforts to overtake the highwaymen on the preceding night.

They had kept up the chase ever since, but fruitlessly, for they were clever enough to get altogether upon a false scent.

Worn out at last with fatigue, they all pulled up at the inn where our two friends chanced to pause.

In default of stable room, the horses were placed at the side of the house, where they were tolerably well sheltered from the cold.

The officers went inside.

This was about half an hour previous to the arrival of Claude and Jack.

When the landlord entered for the purpose of obtaining the tankard of ale Claude had asked for, he remarked that two travellers had arrived outside, and were in too great a hurry to enter.

This communication caused a couple of the officers to start up and look through the window.

They recognised the highwaymen at the very first glance, and rushed out pell-mell.

They made a frantic dash for their horses, shouting and swearing all the time at the very top of their voices.

In order to allow the animals to eat more at ease, the landlord had taken upon himself to remove the bits from their mouths and also to loosen their saddle-girths.

The first delay occurred in replacing the bits.

This done, the officers went in hot haste to mount.

But the moment they put foot in the stirrup and sprang up, the weight of their bodies caused the saddles to turn round.

Down went the officers on their backs in a moment.

As they lay sprawling about under their horses, they did indeed present a most ludicrous spectacle.

No wonder Jack and Claude laughed so heartily.

The officers, however, failed to see the most distant semblance of a joke in the incident.

Covered with mud from head to foot, and suffering some little pain from the bruises they had sustained, they struggled to their feet, pouring out, as they did so, the most awful imprecations that can be imagined.

But it was against the landlord that their wrath was directed, for beyond doubt he was the cause—though an innocent one—of the mischief.

Animated by a spirit of revenge, which for a time made them oblivious of all else, they made a simultaneous rush upon the unfortunate man.

He was seized in a moment.

The officers' fury was augmented by the landlord's demeanor, for the accident had so tickled his fancy that, instead of hastening to the assistance of his guests, he had leaned up against the wall, and, with his hands to his sides, had indulged in a tremendous burst of laughter.

The officers' rage was redoubled.

"To the horse-trough with him!" roared one. "D—n him—I'll let him know whether he is going to play off such tricks as these upon us with impunity! This way—this way!"

Never was command more promptly obeyed.

The landlord's merriment subsided with amazing suddenness.

In vain he assured them that it was no practical joke that he had played upon them.

In vain he entreated them to have mercy upon him.

The officers were completely deaf.

In the hands of so many, the landlord was utterly powerless.

His frantic struggles were as unable to save him from his impending fate.

The horse-trough was reached.

By main strength the unfortunate man was raised and tossed into it.

Then, not content with giving him this icy bath—for the morning was a bitterly cold one—some held him down, while others with hearty good will plied the handle of the pump which stood at one end of the horse-trough.

Nor did they cease their discipline until compelled to do so, partly from exhaustion, and partly because reflection returning reminded them that all this time they had been neglecting important business.

Ceasing suddenly, then, their treatment of the landlord, they hurried back to their horses.

With many horrible curses they tightened the saddle-girths, and, having seen that all was secure, mounted.

By this time the landlord recovered himself sufficiently to scramble out of the trough.

He presented a deplorable spectacle.

The water ran from him in streams, and as he walked he left a perfect brook behind him.

He was breathless, yet he contrived to stammer out threats of vengeance.

But the officers only laughed at him, which increased his incensement tenfold.

"Forward!" cried the police officer who was in command of the rest—"forward, I say, or we shall be too late!"

As he spoke, he clapped spurs to his horse's sides.

His example was followed by his companions, and away they went at full speed down the road in the direction the highwaymen had taken.

But a considerable delay had by this time taken place—so considerable that it enabled the highwaymen to obtain an excellent start.

Although their prey was now out of sight, the officers pressed onwards.

Their course, however, was taken completely at random.

Yet it was not until daybreak that the chief officer admitted that he had been utterly foiled.

"It's no use, my lads!" he cried. "D—n that landlord—it's all his fault, though. But we'll be even with him one of these next days. It's no good going on any further—not a bit. We must turn back. But, for all that, I mean to have another try, whenever I get the chance."

So saying, the officer turned round, and the whole of the troop, looking very tired, very angry, and very crestfallen, retraced their steps.

In the meantime, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had improved this incident to the utmost.

By pushing their horses to the utmost of their capacity at the first starting, they had managed to get quite out of sight of the officers.

Then, gradually reducing their rate of speed, they changed their course again, and once more rode direct towards the place they wished to reach.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN DEPART ON THEIR PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

It was very close indeed upon daylight when Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack reached the ruins of the old castle.

While approaching it, they had kept the most careful look-out, and felt satisfied that they had gained the rendezvous unperceived.

As they fully anticipated, they found their companions anxiously awaiting and looking for their arrival.

"Safe and sound, I see," were Dick Turpin's first words. "I had begun to grow anxious about your safety."

"And no wonder," said Claude, as he alighted. "Here Jack Ostler, take my horse; I am too weary to do any thing myself."

Sixteen-String Jack was not less fatigued.

Nevertheless, they were not permitted to rest until they had given an account of their adventures.

Dick Turpin listened to the whole recital with great interest, and so did Maud.

"Have you any idea," asked the former, "what might be the actual amount of wealth contained in the cavern?"

"I have not," replied Jack; "it is, however, of considerable amount, though, if it was twice as much, I question whether Claude would descend to fetch it."

"Is, then, the sight so very horrible?" asked Maud, speaking with considerable hesitation.

"It is indeed," answered Jack, with a shudder.

Maud looked deeply disappointed.

"At any rate," said Dick, "should we ever be badly in need of a sum of money, and not know where to obtain it, there would at least be that resource to fly to."

"Beyond all doubt there would."

Hearing these words, Maud's countenance brightened again.

The reason why she grasped so eagerly at the idea of taking possession of this wealth was that during the night Dick and herself had passed alone in the ruins she had made use of every argument she could think of to induce him to abandon his present mode of life.

Dick loved Maud too tenderly and truly to listen unmoved to her entreaties, yet he knew not how to comply with them.

At last he was induced to promise that, should he ever be able to amass a sufficient sum of money to keep them above want, he would, without delay, seek out a place in some foreign land where he was unknown, and live there a life of peacefulness and rest.

Oh, how glad this promise made the heart of Maud! for she could at last see something like a definite prospect of her husband quitting his perilous career.

How this account of Sixteen-String Jack's coming so close upon the promise naturally filled her with excitement!

As for Dick himself, he felt inclined to look upon the matter in a light more serious than he had hitherto done.

It was with a keen pang at his heart that he reflected how truly fearful would be Maud's career should he by any means be deprived of life.

It is true that so far he had with impunity braved almost every danger; but yet a time might come when his good fortune would desert him.

At any night, upon one of his excursions, a bullet might lay him low.

Then, deprived of his support, what was Maud to do?

It is easy to understand how well calculated to induce serious feelings these thoughts were.

Yet, with admirable self-possession, he contrived to keep them locked up in his breast, though he could not help dwelling mentally upon the account which his two comrades had given him.

There are moments in our lives when all seems dark and dull—when favourite and eagerly-followed pursuits lose all their charm—when a kind of despondency weighs upon the spirits, and when we long for some great change to take place in our lives.

It was thus, to a certain extent, with Dick Turpin at this moment.

A longing for something like repose came over his mind—a desire for some sort of respite from his adventurous course.

The prospect of a peaceful, happy home with Maud, in some fair clime, where summer always reigns, and where he would have nought to fear from his lawless creatures, seemed most enticing, and just then he longed ardently for its realisation.

He believed that could this dream only become reality he should be happy and content.

It is very questionable, however, whether such would have been the case for long.

After a time, in all probability the desire would return with redoubled force for adventure and excitement.

Whether this was ever destined to be the case, the course of events only can disclose.

During that day nothing occurred important enough to deserve recordation.

At nightfall, however, the highwaymen assembled, and

gave themselves up to a careful consideration of the enterprise that lay before them.

Despite its risks, they were fully resolved to undertake it.

Still they consulted carefully together, for, despite their resolution, they could not but feel that they were about to run into a very serious danger—perhaps the only one in which they were about to engage would prove fatal to one or more of them.

It is not necessary to place their deliberations before the reader.

Events will soon show their nature.

Every preparation was made

Maud wept bitterly.

She dreaded to see Dick depart on an errand fraught with so much peril.

Most earnestly did she entreat him to allow her to accompany them.

Over and over again she assured him she would not be in the way—that she would be brave, and that the expedition would be shorn of half its dangers.

But Dick felt it impossible to accede to her request, though it pained him much to deny her.

He felt that Maud's presence at such a time would be the very thing that would unnerve him.

He would be concerned and abstracted all the while, on account of her safety, whereas, by leaving her at the ruins, this anxiety was avoided.

But to Maud there was something inexpressibly dreadful in remaining for so long a period in the ruins by herself.

She soon found, however, that Dick was determined, and that it would be utter futility to attempt to persuade him to change his resolution.

But it was with a heavy heart, and with many forebodings of coming danger, that she resigned herself to her dreary fate.

What caused the highwaymen the most consultation and the greatest uneasiness was the doubt they experienced as to whether the van would start in the morning or at night.

In the former case their destination would be reached before midday, in the latter, before midnight.

It was as likely to be the one as the other.

If the first, the hazard of making the attack would be so great that one would think no sane men would venture it.

But Dick and his comrades were not ordinary mortals, and therefore unswayed by ordinary considerations.

It was finally thus determined by Dick Turpin:

"We will make sure both ways," he cried, "and we will contrive to do it in this way: On the night of the 20th—that is the night next following—we will set out for our destination."

"That is very soon," observed Maud, timidly.

"Not a moment too soon," replied Dick, with decision. "In case the van should start at nine in the morning we shall be there in readiness to intercept it. If at night, so much the better. It will be an easy matter for us to conceal ourselves until the proper moment arrives."

It was felt at once that no better arrangement than this could possibly be made, and it was decided upon without the least hesitation.

So great was the suspense and impatience of all concerned, that the time seemed as though it would never pass away.

At the appointed hour, however, the shades of evening began to close in, and the ruined castle at once assumed an aspect of bustle and excitement.

So soon as ever it was dark enough to make it safe, the highwaymen mounted in readiness to depart.

Maud clung tightly to Dick, and seemed as though it would be a total impossibility for her to part with him.

Gently but firmly, however, Dick released himself from her close embrace.

As he did so, he said:

"Be brave, Maud—be of good heart! Believe me all will yet be well. Do not suffer greater apprehensions on my account than you can help; and above all things do not on any account be induced even for a moment to leave the protecting shadow of the ruins. I leave you with one whose fidelity has been well tried, and I do not feel afraid but that he will protect and save you from all

harm. Farewell for a brief space, and, while I am away console yourself with the thought that you are perhaps much nearer to the realisation of your great hope than you imagine. Once more, farewell!"

As he uttered this last word, Dick Turpin rode somewhat hastily away, for he was afraid to trust himself to linger longer.

Maud, with a faint, dying cry, sank back and leaned against the ruins for support.

It was only with the greatest difficulty, and by the exercise of the greatest possible amount of self-control, that she prevented herself from fainting.

What helped her, however, perhaps more than anything else to retain possession of her senses was the strong desire she felt to watch as long as she was able the retreating forms of her husband and his companions.

Pressing her hand, then, tightly upon her heart, and leaning against the crumbling walls, she watched them until a projection of the stonework hid them from her sight.

Dick did not trust himself to look back, but pushed on at a pace almost too rapid for the exercise of due caution.

London lay between the highwaymen and their destination, but they carefully avoided the metropolis.

This necessitated a very considerable detour, but then there was not so much fear that they would encounter any band of police officers, and, moreover, they were able to put their horses to good speed.

Dick's intention was to ride direct to Greenwich with all possible speed; then, upon his arrival there, to work his way back towards London, until they could either obtain the information they required, or else take up their position in a favorable spot.

Owing to the unfrequented routes they were careful to take, they succeeded in reaching Greenwich without encountering any interruption whatever.

They paused outside the town, and just then a church clock began to strike.

By counting the strokes they found the hour to be ten.

"We have plenty of time before us," Dick remarked, "but we must be careful what we do. It is quite certain that we are here first, and all we have to do is to go quietly towards London. We shall then be certain of meeting with the van."

Accordingly, keeping in twos and at some distance apart, so as not to appear all in one company, which might have attracted suspicion, they journeyed at an easy rate along the high-road.

By the hour of eleven they found themselves some six or seven miles distant, and close to an inn that was very pleasantly shaded by some tall trees of luxuriant foliage.

"This is the place to gain the information we require," said Dick.

"But you must conduct your questionings carefully."

"Oh, of course! We will just pause here for a few moments, but not dismount."

To this Tom King assented, at the same time making a sign to his comrades behind to ride on without taking the least notice of them.

It was a bold step for Dick to take, but then he had borne in mind the fact that he was now in a part of the country which he had never before visited, and where, consequently, there was not much fear that he would be recognised.

"House—house!" he cried, in a loud voice; but, to his surprise, no notice was taken of his summons.

He repeated it, with no better effect.

"One would think, Tom, that all the people had gone to bed, only it is scarcely likely they would do so and leave the house open and lighted up in this fashion."

"It is odd," said Tom. "I will call; perhaps my voice may reach further than yours."

Tom called accordingly, but all remained as silent as before.

This was more than strange.

The inn had a remarkably quiet look, as though, as a rule, but little trade was done at it; and if the present was a sample of the amount of attention they paid to callers, want of business was not to be wondered at.

Our two friends waited for several moments in patience, but with no better success than at first.

"This is about the oddest thing that ever happened to me," said Dick.

"It seems to me we shall get no good by waiting here," rejoined his comrade.

"It does indeed; but still my curiosity is excited by such an unusual circumstance. Let us await for a moment, and ascertain, if we can, what it means."

Nothing loth, Tom King left the saddle.

The two horses were then secured to a couple of rings fixed in the trough for that purpose, and then the two highwaymen boldly crossed the threshold of the inn.

The first room they came to was illuminated by the blaze of a cheerful fire, but a glance served to show them that it was vacant.

Wondering more and more, the two friends strode on.

Suddenly both paused, for a strange and muffled noise had just then assailed their ears.

After listening for a moment they ascertained its character.

Some person or persons were sobbing and sighing at a great rate, as though suffering an extremity of woe.

Guided by the sounds, they pressed onwards, and presently paused at a door that was slightly ajar.

It was evidently from the room beyond that the sounds of sorrow came.

Dick gently pushed the door open about an inch wider, and peeped in.

His eyes then fell upon a most sorrow-stricken group.

Seated in a most dejected attitude by the fireside was a man.

Dick could not see his features, for his face was turned towards the fireplace.

Next to him sat a woman, who, though of middle age, yet preserved in a remarkable degree an appearance of youthfulness.

Her face Dick could see, and as he gazed upon it, he felt that he should not forget it for many a day.

The expression it wore was one of stolid, soul-chilling despair.

It was as though all hope had been frozen in her bosom.

Near her was a young girl, whose face was buried in her hands.

But glistening tears forced their way through her fingers, while her sobs were truly heart-rending to listen to.

A man, attired half like a waiting man, half like an ostler, was sitting on one corner of a table, dangling his legs to and fro, and keeping his eyes resolutely fixed upon the floor.

There seemed to be several others in the room, but these were all that could be seen distinctly through the narrow crevice of the door.

For a moment or so, Dick hesitated.

He was in doubt whether he should retire quietly, leaving the people at the inn altogether ignorant of his visit, or whether he should make his presence known.

It almost seemed as though their grief was of too deep and sacred a character to be intruded upon by strangers.

It was evident that it utterly absorbed their faculties, rendering them quite oblivious of all that was taking place around them.

But it was the very intensity of this grief which made Dick Turpin hesitate.

He was full of curiosity to know what species of calamity it could have been to have wrought such great effects.

His inclination was strong to enter, and most assuredly he would have done so had he had the slightest inkling that he could have been of any service to them, or if he thought he could in any way assuage and mitigate their great grief.

With a sudden effort, he arrived at a decision.

Pushing open the door somewhat suddenly, he strode into the room.

The noise made by his entrance caused the different members of the group to look up.

But when Dick encountered so many tearful visages, and saw so many stony eyes turned upon him, he wished he had decided differently.

But it was now too late to retreat.

All gazed at him inquiringly.

"I am very sorry to intrude upon a scene of such great domestic trouble," he said, in a gentle voice that came naturally to him on occasions like the present, and which had a most soothing effect upon his hearers. "I repeat I am sorry to intrude, but I did so inadvertently. We halted at your door, called aloud in vain, and at last entered to see whether the place could be deserted."

"Gentlemen," said the man before the fire, and who, beyond a doubt, was the landlord—"gentlemen, if you wish for refreshment of any kind do not seek it here—quit this abode of misery. Ride on a little further, and you will find another inn where all your wants will be attended to. We cannot serve you here."

It was palpable that the landlord spoke with only the greatest possible effort.

Every now and then his voice would become choked and almost lost.

Then it would quaver in a manner which showed to what a sore extent his heart was oppressed.

Again Dick hesitated.

The landlord, without troubling himself to see whether his words were attended to, resumed his former attitude.

So strange a reception surely was never given in an inn before, and Dick wished from the bottom of his heart that he should be able to arrive at some solution of the mystery, though how to set about it he had not the least idea.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT FORTUNE FAVORS THE HIGHWAYMEN IN AN UNCOMMON DEGREE

A FEW moments elapsed, and then the landlord, raising his head, said, in a voice of extreme bitterness:

"Is the sight of our woe so pleasing to you that you can do nothing but feast your eyes upon it? If so, gaze on—you are welcome."

"You mistake my motive for lingering altogether," said Turpin, who was not a little embarrassed by the manner in which he had been addressed.

"What is it, then?"

"To offer you consolation, such as——"

The landlord interrupted him with a shrill, contemptuous laugh.

"Or, what would be better," continued Turpin, retreating towards the door, "to do anything which happened to be within my power to alleviate your distress, which, I can assure you, wrings my heart to witness."

It was impossible for anyone to doubt the earnestness of what Dick said.

Sincerity itself was in every tone of his voice.

The landlord seemed to think so, for, in a voice of less asperity, he replied:

"Sir, such behaviour as this from a stranger is unusual indeed. I am sorry I so much mistook your intention. Let me assure you, however, that my grief is so deep and so irremediable that it must be far beyond the power of any stranger to mitigate it in the least degree."

"I regret to hear that," answered Turpin. "Still, it would be quite possible for you to be perfectly ignorant of the powers I possess. Would money serve you?"

The landlord slowly and sadly shook his head.

"I see how it is," he said. "You are curious, and it is not unnatural that you should be. Have what you want. You shall not depart unsatisfied, and I will lay bare all my troubles to you."

"I can only express my satisfaction at your determination; and, oddly enough, there comes over my mind a conviction that I may be able to soothe your pang."

The landlord shook his head in token of dissent, then said:

"Sit down, gentlemen—sit down. What I have to tell I shall not be long relating, though I little thought that I should ever make a stranger acquainted with my disgrace."

This was rather a difficult speech to make any reply to, so, very wisely, Dick Turpin remained silent, waiting for the landlord to commence.

His suspense was soon at an end, for in a trembling, hesitating voice the landlord began thus:

"Sir, you must understand I had a son—indeed, I have him now in one sense, though he is lost to me for ever.

My only son, sir, you understand, and therefore petted and fondled, and indulged too much—until, in fact, the very kindness with which we treated him proved his ruin. I lay the blame more upon myself than upon him," he added. "Don't you, wife?"

This appeal was answered by a loud and passionate burst of grief.

After a brief pause the landlord resumed:

"He was always a wild, harum-scarum young fellow—always in mischief from his very birth; but his pranks amused us, and, so far from checking him, we encouraged him in them. But I shall tire your patience if I go on thus."

Dick warmly protested the contrary.

"Nevertheless, I will pass over all that, and come to my trouble at once. Things went on and on, and at last my poor boy got into companionship with a lot of bad fellows. I was sure they would bring him to no good, and remonstrated with him on the subject, pointing out to him what would be the inevitable result. But he only laughed at my 'groundless fears,' as he called them, and went on as before. Then, indeed, did I blame myself for the course I had pursued. Had I kept a better check upon my boy in his younger days I should have been able to control him then. As it was, I had not the slightest influence or power over him. And then he was always so lively, so kind, so generous, and so happy. His cheerful spirits always filled the house with sunshine, and I, weak, insensate fool that I was, could not bring myself to think even of adopting any harsh measures towards him. But I am running on and on, and not coming to the point."

But Dick again declared how deeply interested he was in every word, which was not to be wondered at.

There was a rude kind of pathos in the landlord's manner, and the way in which he spoke of his scapegrace son, and the construction he tried to place upon his acts, showed all a fond parent's devoted love.

Alas, how often is this precious love poured out and unrequited!

"In a word, sir," resumed the landlord, suddenly, and speaking with apparent effort, "my boy got from bad to worse. Insensibly his bad companions led him on, and he began to descend the steep hill of ruin. He was past me now, although I still made use at every opportunity of prayers and expostulations.

"At length, sir, he—he was accused of being concerned in a robbery.

"The charge seemed to crush me, but, rallying myself, I set forth at once to see what could be done on my boy's behalf.

"I tried my utmost to compromise the affair, but the prosecutor was a stern, unmerciful man, who had never known what it is to feel a father's affection for his child.

"Despite all my efforts, my boy was arrested, brought up before a magistrate, examined, and, on the evidence then produced, committed for trial.

"Still, I did not relax my efforts, but they were all quite unproductive.

"He was carried to Newgate, and a few days ago took his trial.

"I engaged eloquent counsel on his behalf, but their skill availed not against the array of incontrovertible evidence.

"The rascally crew with whom he had been associated managed matters so that my boy was their scapegoat.

"He suffered for all their sins, while they escaped scot-free.

"Oh, sir," the landlord continued, with a fresh burst of feeling, "you cannot conceive what a terrible blow this has been to me! To think that my only, much-loved son should be the first to bring shame and disgrace upon our name! It is more than a hundred and fifty years since this house was built by one of my ancestors. His descendants have lived in it ever since, and during all that time there has not been even the shadow of a stain cast upon their characters.

"Now that good name, so long preserved, so highly valued, is gone—gone for ever!"

With a sob that sounded more like a groan, the landlord allowed his face to fall between his hands.

Dick and Tom King were deeply moved by this recital, for quite unconsciously the landlord in his excitement had

been to a pitch of rude, untutored eloquence that was all the more touching on that very account.

Quickly raising his head, he continued:

"I ought to disown him—to cast him forth—never to think of him again! He has proved himself unworthy of all consideration. I ought to curse him—to curse the very day and hour——"

"No, no, John," said his wife, tearfully, rising from her seat and placing her hand upon the landlord's shoulder, "you ought not to curse. It is not so much our poor boy who is to blame, but ourselves. If we had acted more wisely, the result would have been very, very different."

"Yes, wife, you are right!" ejaculated the landlord, dashing his hand violently against his forehead—"you are quite right—the fault is ours. And now, sir, I have done. Is not my grief inconsolable?"

"I trust not."

"Trust not? In what way can I be relieved?"

"You have not told me the result of the trial."

"No, no—I forgot that. Well, then, by the sanguinary laws of this land, my poor boy was liable to a shameful death upon the scaffold."

"Yes," said Turpin; "but the time will come when that sanguinary law will exist no longer, and when the legislature will not believe the theft of any sum over a shilling in value shall be heinous enough to deserve death."

"Well, well, it may be so, but that will not alter my case."

"No, truly. But your boy—is he——"

"Condemned to die, you would say."

"Yes."

"He had a narrow escape, but the counsel I engaged pleaded for mercy so effectually and so well that his sentence was commuted to transportation for life."

"For life?"

"Yes, and we are now about to gaze upon him for the last time—one more glimpse will be accorded to us. As if to make the disgrace more bitter and hard to bear, he will be brought from London to this place, where we are all known so well, and from whence he will embark on board a vessel chartered to take out him and other condemned prisoners. Now, sir, you do indeed know all, and I cannot but thank you for the interest and sympathy you have shown in the whole narration."

Again the landlord buried his face.

Dick glanced into Tom King's countenance.

A meaning look was exchanged between them.

Dick rose.

"Perhaps," he said, "we may be able to render you more effectual assistance in your strait than you imagine; but before I commit myself by saying anything further, I will just hold a brief conference with my companion."

The landlord was so amazed at this speech that he could not utter a single syllable.

But his countenance well expressed his astonishment.

Tom King followed Dick Turpin to the front of the inn, where they found their horses in perfect safety.

"Could anything have happened more fortunate than this?" exclaimed Dick.

"Fortunate! that is a strange word to use."

"It is on the present occasion, but you know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"It was very strange that I should feel so much curiosity in the landlord's trouble from the very first."

"I suppose you intend to tell him what we are to do?"

"Yes, in this way: If he is willing that his son should be rescued——"

"You may make sure of that, Dick. He is so fond that he would sacrifice his own life for him."

"Well, then, supposing that to be so, he will be a most important ally—in fact, just the man we require, and that we could not very well do without."

"We should have pretty good hostage of his fidelity."

"Yes, I should not be afraid to trust him, and now I propose that we broach the subject to him. Should he fall in with our views, he will find us safe shelter till the moment for action arrives."

"And he will be able to tell us what time we may expect the van."

"Of course he will, and we could scarcely have put the question to anyone without exciting suspicion."

"That is just what I was thinking."

"Well, then, suppose you mount and ride after Jack and Claude, bring them here, and you can explain matters on the road."

"And you?"

"I will remain here and sound the landlord."

Feeling certain that no better arrangement than this could possibly be made, Tom King sprang upon the back of his horse and galloped after his companions.

Turpin watched him for a moment, then turned into the inn.

He encountered the landlord in the passage, that individual having recovered possession of his senses sufficiently to rise and walk towards the front door.

"Step into a private room with me," said Dick, "I have something of importance to communicate."

Almost mechanically the landlord obeyed.

Dick shut the door.

Then turning round, said:

"In the first place, I am about to confide to you a momentous secret, but I shall trust to your honor to keep it inviolate. If you betrayed me it would be the depth of baseness."

"Never fear, sir; but what may this secret be?"

"Wait a moment and I will tell you; but first of all you must answer me some questions."

The landlord inclined his head.

"In the first place, you would be glad if by any means your son could recover his liberty?"

"Sir—sir, forbear!"

"Forbear?"

"Yes; do not mention such a thing to me, or you will drive me mad! That is a hope and a thought I dare not entertain!"

"But for supposition's sake?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Tell me," said Dick, speaking in an impressive whisper; "suppose it should be possible to set him free, should you scruple much at the means employed?"

"I do not understand you," answered the landlord, breathlessly.

"If you could rescue him from his guard, would you do so?"

"But that would be utterly impossible."

"But supposing it was in your power, should you do so?"

"Yes; and if I thought I should succeed I would gladly pour out every drop of my heart's blood."

"That is exactly what I expected," said Dick; "but hark! I hear some one approaching—they are friends of mine."

"Friends of yours?"

"Yes, true, devoted allies—not friends in the ordinary sense of the word. Wait a little while. What else passes between us shall be said in their presence."

There was a brief pause, and then the three highwaymen entered.

"I should think we had better not leave our horses outside," said Tom.

"No, no, gentlemen, you shall not. I will see to them."

"Here, Isaac—Isaac!"

In response to this call the servant man appeared.

He looked to the full as dejected as his master; but then the landlord's son had ever been his favorite.

"Only put the horses somewhere under cover," said Dick; "do not remove any of their trappings. We may require them at an instant's notice."

The ostler simply nodded his head, and passed out.

"You can trust to him, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"In his charge your cattle will be perfectly safe, I will answer for that."

The door was then carefully closed.

The landlord trembled with excitement, while his heart beat at so violent a rate that he could scarcely breathe.

He expected some strange and startling disclosure, yet could not for the life of him make out what its exact nature would be.

But Dick Turpin soon relieved him from his state of suspense.

"Just listen attentively," he began. "We have all made up our minds to stop the prisoners' van before it reaches Greenwich and to rescue from it one of the



[MAUD AND JACK OSTLER WATCHING THE INTRUDERS.]

prisoners—a friend of ours, you understand—who, like your son, is under sentence of transportation.”

Upon hearing this announcement, the landlord staggered back, until he was brought up rather violently by a wall behind him.

Dick spoke in the calmest and most matter-of-fact manner possible to conceive, and, having spoken, waited patiently for the effect it produced upon the landlord to subside.

“Stop the prisoners’ van?” he gasped, at length.

“Yes, such is our intention.”

“What, you four?”

“Yes.”

“Impossible!”

“Why so?”

“It is too well protected by officers. You would lose your lives in the attempt.”

“Leave that to us,” said Dick. “We are not at all No. 211.—BLACK BESS.

alarmed on that score. Now I will tell you what we require of you. In the first place, we want to know when the van is likely to reach here—in the second, whether you will afford us safe shelter until then? If you consent, then, in return for doing so, we will take care to set your son at liberty. You are surprised, but take a minute to recover yourself.”

“No, it is not requisite. Still, I must say that I consider your attempt will be nothing short of utter madness, and will inevitably result in your destruction.”

“As I said, you must leave that to us. You can believe me or not when I say we *shall* do it. Now, then, are you inclined to agree?”

“It would be folly to hesitate in such a case.”

“I thought that would be your decision.”

“But—but I have my doubts still about your success.”

“Time will soon show whether they are well or ill

loaded. But about the van—when will it pass here?"

"I expect between ten and twelve to-morrow."

"That is awkward."

"That is what I thought," said the landlord. "If you had proposed to carry out your attack under cover of darkness I should have thought it much more feasible."

"Daylight does indeed fearfully augment the difficulties of our task; but still, for all that, our associate must be set free."

"I don't see how it is to be done. The van is always so well guarded, and, except at night, this road is always well frequented."

A shade of uneasiness overspread Dick's face upon hearing this intelligence, for, of course, the landlord knew perfectly well what he was talking about.

"No matter," he said, resolutely—"it must be done, and I have never set my mind upon a task yet and failed in it. However, we must have a private consultation among ourselves. Are you willing that it should take place in your house?"

"How could I refuse you so reasonable a request, for, crack-brained as I consider your scheme to be, yet, for my son's sake, I most heartily hope that you will be successful, though, at the same time, I feel that it is hoping in defiance of probability. Can I be of any further assistance to you?"

"Not at present, I think; but you can bring us some refreshment, for we are all thirsty."

"You are heartily welcome to all the house affords; and if you only save my son from his dreadful fate, I shall ever look upon you as the greatest benefactors the world can show."

"Hark!" said Dick.

"What do you hear?"

"Horsemen on the road."

"Yes, I hear them now quite plainly," answered the landlord.

"Who are they, think you?"

"It is a troop of some kind—ten or a dozen at least; but I will soon have a look."

With these words the landlord sallied forth.

"I do believe," he said, returning quite out of breath, "that they are soldiers."

"Or police officers," suggested Dick.

"Yes, or officers."

"Then, if they are, you can easily understand that we wish to run no risk of being seen by them. Have you got any private chamber that we can occupy?"

"Yes, upstairs."

"Then conduct us to it."

"I don't think it at all likely the officers will call here."

"Still, in case they do?"

"You shall go if you wish it."

"We do."

"Then follow me at once."

With these words they all sallied forth into the passage.

They were headed by the landlord, who at once led the way to the staircase.

Just as he placed his foot upon the bottom step the horsemen drew up with a dash in front of the inn, and began bawling at the top of their lungs for the landlord.

"I did not think they were so near," he said.

"Nor I," answered Dick. "Tell us which the room is, and we will ascend alone. You go at once to the door, and, above all things, preserve your calmness."

"You may depend upon me doing that."

"Which room?"

"The first door on your right at the top."

"Enough; and bear in mind if those outside are officers, and if they ask you any questions about us, you must be careful to tell them that you have not seen us."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES LEARN SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS. WITH these words, Dick Turpin and his comrades rapidly ascended the staircase while the landlord tended to the front door of the inn.

It took our friends but a moment to reach the door which had been described to them.

Opening it, they found themselves in a tolerably spacious and well-furnished apartment.

It was quite dark, with the exception of what slight amount of illumination proceeded from the two latticed casements, through which the night sky could be dimly seen.

But our friends liked it all the better for being dark.

Their first act was to secure the door.

This done, they crept on tiptoe along the flooring towards the windows, being careful not to make an uproar by coming unexpectedly into collision with any article of furniture.

Two things afforded them especial gratification.

The first was that the room was in the front of the house, and that the windows commanded a view of the high-road below.

The second was, that one of the windows was open.

At a first glance they saw that a troop of mounted police officers had drawn up near the horse-trough.

Upon counting, they found the number to be nine—in all probability eight subordinates and a sergeant.

Our friends were careful to keep back so as to be out of sight.

The open window allowed them to listen to every word that was uttered below.

So expeditious were they in their movements that they had actually just taken up their position at the window when the landlord accosted the officers.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" he said. "What shall I have the pleasure of serving you with?"

"Nothing on the present occasion. We are on important business, which admits of no delay, only we called here to ask you a question."

"A question?" echoed the landlord, not knowing exactly what better to say.

"Yes. I want to know whether you have happened to see four dashing-looking horsemen anywhere in the vicinity—one mounted on a magnificent coal-black mare?"

"Four horsemen?"

"Yes. I may as well tell you who they are. Their names are Dick Turpin—"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the landlord.

"Tom King," continued the officer, without heeding the interruption in the least, "Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack."

"Good gracious!" said the landlord again. "You don't mean to say that those desperate characters have taken this road? If they have, there will be an end to my custom!"

"I will tell you how it is," said the officer. "But stay, here is a bill describing their persons, and offering a reward of three thousand pounds if they are all captured. A gentleman who has been robbed lately has just added five hundred pounds to the amount."

"Three thou—"

"Sand pounds," added the officer. "Bear that in mind, and keep a sharp look-out, will you?"

We are sure the reader can form but a slight idea of the state of mind the four highwaymen were in during this conversation.

They were apprehensive, and not without good cause.

They knew but little of the landlord, and, for aught they could tell, the hope of gaining a share of so large a sum as three thousand pounds might overcome all other considerations.

Then any incaution on his part would serve to excite the suspicions of the officers.

If once these were aroused their situation would be ticklish indeed, for they were quite ignorant of the whereabouts of the stables, so it was scarcely possible that they would be able to gain possession of their steeds.

It was, therefore, with the most acute suspense and anxiety that they watched the progress of events below.

The landlord, by the aid of the lamp hanging over the front door of the inn, had taken a good look at the bill.

Of course he had perused the descriptions, and if

so, could not have failed to know who his guests were.

"It was a critical moment.

"Well," asked the officer, "have you seen any one answering that description lurking about?"

"No—I am pleased to say I haven't, and, what's more, I hope, for the sake of my trade, I never shall."

The highwayman drew a long breath of relief.

One anxiety was removed.

The landlord had committed himself, and, for his own safety's sake, would take care not to betray the highwaymen, otherwise he would be liable to punishment as an accomplice.

Still the danger was by no means over yet.

"Then you haven't seen them?" said the officer.

"I haven't."

"Well, then, just let me tell you the best thing you can do is to keep an uncommonly sharp look-out."

"But are they really on this road?"

"It is suspected so, and, if you must know, the facts are just these: An accomplice of theirs has been sentenced to transportation. It was expected they would try to rescue him from Newgate, and every precaution was taken in case the attempt should be made. But all has gone quiet so far; but, from circumstances which have occurred, there is reason to believe they will attack the van that will convey the prisoners to Greenwich."

"Good gracious!" said the landlord again.

"They are known to be somewhere north of London, and at this moment all the roads about London are so closely watched that they cannot get here unseen."

"But you fancy they have been beforehand with you?"

"Well, there is just the possibility of it, and we are determined not to leave a point unguarded, so we have come on in order to clear the way for the van."

"But that won't be here till to-morrow, will it?" asked the landlord.

The officer put his finger to the side of his nose, and assumed a highly sagacious look.

"That's just where we shall trick 'em."

"Is it, indeed?"

"Yes—nine o'clock to-morrow morning is the time given out for the van to start from Newgate; but we are to steal a march upon the rascals altogether. By that time all the prisoners will be safe under hatches, or it's dead odd to me!"

"I see," said the landlord; "and a very good plan it is."

"Yes—there is reason to believe they know the time first appointed for the setting out of the van; but that they are quite ignorant of the alteration. So they will come a day after the fair, and we shall be assembled here in such force that we cannot fail to capture them."

"I hope you will, and not let them play up their game on this road. It is no credit to you that you have not captured them long before this."

"It's because so many innkeepers like yourself befriend them," said the officer, "and, while that continues to be the case, we shall have a good deal of trouble in capturing them."

"Well, they won't make any such friends on this road, I assure you."

By this time the officer seemed to realise that he had stopped chatting long enough, so he at once gave the word to push on, repeating his caution to the landlord to keep a sharp look-out.

Not until the last man in the troop of police officers was fairly out of sight, did the landlord venture to quit his position beside the horse-trough.

But as soon as the last one was invisible, he hurried with all speed up-stairs.

"There," he said—"there, did you hear that?"

"Every word."

"And what do you think?"

"That fortune is befriending us as she always does, and this time to a greater extent than we could have ventured to hope for."

"Fortune favours you?" repeated the landlord, as if unable to credit the evidence of his own senses.

"Yes—most assuredly. Our chief obstacle is removed."

The landlord clearly could not comprehend our friend at all.

"I suppose, now," said Dick, "there is no certainty when the van will arrive?"

"No—it may reach here at any moment."

"It won't be long first, I feel convinced, and so I will make my arrangements accordingly. Come on—we will set out at once."

"Stay," said Claude Duval. "Perhaps the landlord here, from his knowledge of the locality, may be able to tell us which would be the most advantageous point at which we can take up our positions."

"Well thought of," said Turpin, who at once turned an inquiring glance upon the landlord, who replied:

"About a mile from here, or it may be rather less, there is a capital place—just suited for your purpose. It is what we call about here a holloway, and even by daylight it is quite gloomy there, and at night, pitch dark."

"I know what you mean," answered Dick. "It will suit us excellently—nothing could be better."

"Is this holloway to the right or the left when we leave your door?"

"To the right."

"Then the van will pass this house before we attack it?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, then. Is there any chance of it stopping?"

"I think not."

"Still, if it should, endeavour to loosen the pins in the wheels. If there should be a break down it will make our task so much the easier."

"I fear there is not much chance of that either. However, you may depend that I shall do all that lies in my power to assist you."

"I do not doubt it."

"Will you start now?"

"Yes, if you will lead us to the stables."

"Follow me, then."

Without another word, the landlord conducted the highwaymen to the stables, where they found all the horses perfectly safe, and looking very comfortable.

To lead them out and mount only occupied a few moments.

"Be prepared for the result," said Dick, to the landlord.

"I will."

But fancying his meaning was not thoroughly comprehended, Turpin added:

"The chances are a thousand to one whether you will see any of us again."

"I shall never forget you!" was the answer, given with great warmth. "My everlasting gratitude—"

"Tush—tush! I want to hear no more of that. We are merely serving ourselves."

"I cannot look upon it in that light."

"Well—well, what I was going to say is that, immediately upon releasing our friend we shall beat a precipitate retreat—in a short time we shall be miles from here, no doubt."

The landlord nodded.

"Your son will then be left to shift for himself. I shall not be able to single him out from the rest, for I have not the slightest idea what his personal appearance is like, and, even if I have, I question whether I should have any chance of recognising him."

"What will he do, then?"

"That I must leave to you. If you can contrive to meet with him soon after his liberation is effected all will be well. Of course he will have to quit the country."

The landlord sighed.

"Better do that voluntarily than in the convict ship. One thing you may depend upon, and that is, that the closest search and most vigorous pursuit will be made after all those who are set at liberty, so that your son will have to be both careful and expeditious in his movements."

The landlord's countenance grew still more thoughtful in its expression.

It was pretty clear that he had been, too much excited and bewildered by what had occurred to give much thought to future arrangements.

"If—if——" he said, and then stopped.

"Speak on," cried Dick.

"If, then, you would not mind adding to the word of obligation——"

"Pooh—pooh. State your wish freely and clearly."

"You are generous. I was about to ask you to give me your advice in this matter. What do you think would be the best thing for my son to do?"

Dick seemed deeply plunged in thought for a few moments.

Then, looking up, he replied:

"My advice is simple enough."

"And no doubt all the better on that very account."

"You shall judge. I should recommend your son to push on with all speed to Sheerness—or the nearest point on the coast where he can get a ship. Then let him embark, and as soon as he is in a place of safety he can communicate with you."

"Nothing could be simpler and better!" cried the landlord, with the air of one who feels immensely relieved. "My best thanks, gentlemen, are your due; and should there ever be an opportunity, you may depend I shall do my best to requite you."

"Enough—enough! As that point is settled, we will say farewell. It is quite time we took up our position."

In this the landlord coincided, and after the exchange of a few more words they separated.

It was at a quiet, easy pace that Dick Turpin led the way towards the spot that had been described to him by the landlord.

"We have abundant cause to congratulate ourselves," he remarked to his comrades. "Fortune has indeed favoured us to an extraordinary degree."

"You are quite right, Dick," returned Claude Duval, "and, what is more, I am inclined to look upon the good luck we have already met with as a presage of the success which is to attend our efforts."

"It will be well to think so—at the same time, in spite of every obstacle, Tom Davis must be set at liberty!"

"We will do our best, Dick, and we can do no more."

"I am aware of it. I am chiefly concerned to know how many officers are actually in attendance upon the vehicle."

"That is an important point; but we have no means of ascertaining it."

"That is just what I regret. However, as soon as we commence the attack let us direct all our energies to the liberation of the prisoners, because, as soon as they are free, they will assist us in our struggles with the officers."

This speech was received in silence, from which it may be inferred that Dick's comrades felt somewhat doubtful regarding this conclusion.

Dick did not speak again, but changed his mare's speed from a walk to a gentle trot.

This soon served to bring them to the spot they wished to reach.

Upon arriving, they found that the landlord's description of the holloway was perfectly correct, and a close examination convinced them that a better place for their purpose could not possibly have been found.

They looked upon this as a good omen, and were in the best of spirits accordingly.

At one time it would seem as though the high-road had been carried over a high but steep hill—or, more properly, ridge, which extended to the right and left for a considerable distance.

The difficulty and danger consequent upon making so steep an ascent and descent had led to the road being made level, or nearly so, by cutting a way through the ridge in question.

The consequence was, that for a distance of something like two hundred yards the road was bounded by a high and almost perpendicular embankment, which was somewhat higher on one side than the other.

These embankments were covered all over with orake, furze bushes, and such like vegetation, while here and there a huge tree rose up, stretching its giant branches far over the roadway.

The size of these trees sufficed to show that this lowering of the road was no modern improvement.

From these causes this part of the roadway was involved in great obscurity.

The high banks shut out a great deal of light, and cast a deep shadow, and the trees only served to increase the gloom.

So dark was it that when they backed their horses close to one side and stood together, the highwaymen were scarcely able to distinguish each other's countenances.

They listened for some moments in perfect silence.

No sound, however, resembling the approach of the vehicle reached their ears.

"Look to your weapons," said Dick, at length, and setting the example of examining his own while he spoke. "You cannot be too careful, and, above everything, have your firearms in readiness."

His companions soon ascertained that all was well in this particular, and Tom King observed:

"I have been wondering, Dick, what means you think of adopting in order to bring the vehicle to a standstill. It will not be like calling out to an ordinary driver, bear in mind. The officers, depend upon it, will be sharp enough to know that their best chance will be in lashing their horses onwards, and you may depend this is what they will do. If they once get out of this shadow they will ascertain our exact force, and I fear matters will go hardly with us."

"I have been thinking about all that," replied Dick, "and I cannot quite see my way clear at present."

"How, captain?"

"Why, if we place any obstruction in the road it must be of a somewhat substantial character to bring a heavy vehicle to a standstill."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, it will necessarily take some time to construct, and then, by the time we have done it, something else may come along."

"You are right, captain."

"Then if we wait till we know the van is coming we shall not have time to get ready the obstruction at all."

"Some means of stopping the van must most certainly be devised," replied Claude Duval, "and I should suggest that one of us should ride on towards London for some distance, take up a good position, and then, upon hearing the van approach, gallop back and let you know."

"That is about all that can be done, I fancy," returned Dick. "Who will take this duty?"

"I will, if you like," said Claude.

"Then do so, as you were the first to propose it."

"Then about the obstruction?"

"That can easily be managed," Sixteen-String Jack cried, "for in the yard at the back of the inn we have just left I saw some large, strong, square pieces of wood. One of these brought, and placed right across the roadway, and firmly fixed a foot or two above the ground, will be the thing above all others to stop the van."

"It will," said Dick, "and now let us spend no farther time in consultation. You, Claude, ride off at once, and give us timely notice of the police officers' approach; and you, Jack, obtain one of the pieces of wood you mention. In the meanwhile Tom and myself will remain here together, awaiting your return."

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS ATTACK THE PRISONERS' VAN.

FROM this understanding both Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack took their departure.

Dick Turpin and Tom King watched them in silence till they had both disappeared in the darkness, then, turning round, the latter said:

"It will be sharp work, Dick, you may depend; and after this event, rely upon it, the officers will make greater efforts than ever to capture us."

"I have been thinking so myself, and believe the best thing we can arrange to do is to lie quiet for a time somewhere."

"Unquestionably it would; but what shall you do with Tom Davis?"

"Get him safely out of the country, I think."

"It would be much the best; for after having been

successful so far the authorities will be furious when they find their prey has slipped through their fingers."

"And, what is more, they will spare no efforts to make him a prisoner again, and should they once do that it will be all over with him. Hark!"

"What do you hear?"

"It is Sixteen-String Jack, I think."

"Yes, or some one else on horseback coming from the direction of the inn. But, Dick——"

"What now?"

"I have just thought of something which we have forgotten."

"What is it?"

"To provide a horse for Tom Davis."

Dick uttered an exclamation.

"That quite escaped me altogether; but it is not now too late to supply the omission."

"Stay. I think it is quite as well that we have not incumbered ourselves with a spare horse."

"But where is Tom to ride?"

"Why, it will be better for him to ride by turns behind all of us. Besides, he may not be altogether in a fit condition to spring on to a horse and ride off at full gallop. We think nothing of it because we are used to it; but it is impossible to say in what way his imprisonment may have affected him."

Dick assented, and then both became silent.

After the lapse of a few moments, during which the beat of a horse's feet had become more and more distinct, Sixteen-String Jack appeared dragging after him a long piece of wood, such as would be suitable for building purposes.

His companions sprang forward eagerly to assist him.

"This is just what we want," cried Dick.

"Is it long enough?"

"Yes, quite."

Nevertheless, to make quite sure, the wood was tried, and found to be quite long enough.

They also perceived that there would be little difficulty in wedging the ends of it between the masses of sandstone of which the lower part of the holloway was composed.

Once more drawing back to their former positions, they waited with great impatience for Claude to appear and give them warning of the approach of the prisoners' van.

It so happened that their suspense was not put to a very severe trial, for Claude Duval appeared suddenly among them.

So suddenly that his appearance caused them all to give vent to expressions of amazement.

"Is it coming?"

"Yes—yes," he answered, somewhat breathlessly.

"But how is it you have come upon us with so much abruptness—we never heard your horse's hoofs."

"I did not intend you should. I purposely took to the meadows at the side of the high-road in order that no suspicions should be awakened in the breasts of the police officers."

During this hurried conversation all four of the highwaymen were busily occupied in raising the barrier which they had devised.

It promised to be an effective one, for the piece of wood, though slight, was strong, and, as they expected, they succeeded in wedging the ends in between the rocks with great firmness.

"Now, my comrades," said Claude, "just let me bid you to prepare, for we shall have the toughest bit of fighting to do to-night that we have ever had in all our lives before!"

"We are ready."

"So am I. Did I tell you I had a peep at the van?"

"No, no—have you seen it?"

"Yes. After going some distance I took to the meadows, and pushed on until presently a vehicle came in sight. I pulled up, and, taking care to keep well under cover, watched it go by."

"And was it well guarded?"

"Pretty well."

"By how many officers?"

"Six or seven."

Dick gave a long whistle, and then ejaculated:

"Rather long odds!"

"Very, I should say."

"Are you sure there are so many?"

"Tolerably so. I saw either four or five riding on the outside of the van, and two more were riding on horseback at the sides."

"Indeed, then, you may depend that these will be the men who will give us the most trouble. There must be no blundering, mind," Dick added. "You must understand that it is a life or death matter—either they will slay us or we must slay them, and of the two evils I should prefer the latter. When those officers come, attack them at once, and down with them!"

"There they are, then," cried Claude.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips, than a distant rumbling sound was heard—a sound which could not be mistaken.

"Are your weapons all ready?" asked Dick. "Make quite sure."

"All's well, captain."

"Then keep well out of sight until the horses reach the barrier, then the greater suddenness with which you spring out the better."

They were anxious moments that elapsed while they listened to the approach of the heavy vehicle—anxious in every sense of the term.

Keeping a tight hand upon their bridles, they watched with eyes strained in the endeavour to pierce the gloom.

At length a dark object appeared in view, and, as if to assure his comrades that there was no mistake, Claude whispered:

"There it is—that is it!"

"Be ready, then," said Dick, in a low but firm tone.

There was neither time nor opportunity to utter another word.

The prisoners' van was drawn by four horses, for the authorities were anxious that the journey should be made with all possible speed, and it came on at a truly slashing pace.

This the highwaymen were glad enough to see, because it promised them all the more success.

Even if the driver should catch sight of the barrier he would not be able to pull up in time to save his horses, while, if they kept up their speed, the vehicle would be brought to a standstill with so much suddenness that the whole of the officers would for a second at least be quite overcome with surprise.

And now, strangely enough, the two officers on horseback who had been riding a little in advance of the two leading horses dropped back to the rear for some purpose or other.

Had they kept their proper positions, and the positions they were intended to take, namely, about twenty paces in front of the leading horses, the barrier would have been discovered.

But it was fated that events should turn out otherwise.

With a crash that was truly awful and sickening to hear, the two first horses dashed with full force against the barrier.

Down they went as if struck by lightning, and it was a thousand wonders they did not bring the other two horses down with them. They lay on the ground kicking and plunging at a furious rate, and making terrific though ineffectual attempts to rise.

Owing to the sudden stoppage, the van swayed backwards and forwards in an alarming manner for a moment, and it really seemed for a time as though it would overbalance and topple to the ground.

But it righted itself.

In the meantime Sixteen-String Jack had hastened to the spot where the two fore horses were lying.

With about three strokes of his sword he demolished the harness which obstructed their movements.

No sooner were the animals freed from this incumbrance than, making another tremendous effort, they rose to their feet and started off at a headlong gallop down the road.

While Jack was thus employed, his comrades were fully occupied.

The police officers for a few fleeting seconds seemed absolutely paralysed by the suddenness of the shock.

Our friends made the most of this advantage.

In a loud voice Dick Turpin cried:

"Surrender—surrender! Resistance is folly, and can only end in death! Our force far exceeds yours, and we are determined; therefore surrender or blood be spilt!"

"Surrender be damned!" said a voice. "Here they are at last! Down with them! One good volley sweeps them from our path! Fire!"

Before the officers had time to obey this order of the one who had command of them, the highwaymen fired their pistols, then rapidly shifted their positions.

The consequence was that when the officers fired their volley—and as they had their fingers pressing on the triggers they could not stop themselves—it was absolutely of no effect, while the highwaymen had seriously wounded two of their assailants, and injured the right arm of another.

It was at this moment that a tremendous uproar began to make itself heard within the van.

The prisoners, with wonderful quickness, seemed to have arrived at a correct conclusion respecting what was going on outside, and were making the most frantic efforts to liberate themselves accordingly.

At this our friends rejoiced, nor did they fail to call aloud to the prisoners, urging them to use their best efforts to procure their own liberation.

The officer who drove the van was possessed of no ordinary amount of courage, for, in spite of the peril of his position, he laid about him with his whip with great vigour, doing his utmost to get his horses once more in motion.

He might have succeeded in his intent, for the barrier had been broken down by the weight of the horses falling upon it, but Claude Duval kept a tight hold upon the bridle of the off horse with his right hand, while with his left he brought down with one shot the remaining mounted officer.

The odds against the highwaymen were now by no means so great as before, therefore not unreasonably they looked forward with great hopes to their success.

Still there was much to be done.

The officers who remained were resolute, determined men, and seemed as though they would fight to the last gasp rather than surrender their prey.

There was great necessity for speed, as the alarm might be spread and reach the officers who, as our friends knew, were before them on the road, and who had almost had time enough to reach their destination and turn back again.

In all probability it was the belief that assistance was near at hand which made the officers hold out and fight with so much desperation.

All at once there was a terrific crash.

The prisoners within, by some means or other, had contrived to burst open the door at the back.

They rolled out pell-mell, and the scene of confusion which now ensued defies all description.

When this event took place the officers gave up.

They knew too well the general character of the prisoners to doubt but that they would seek the very earliest opportunity of wreaking vengeance upon them.

Therefore those who were unhurt, and those who were wounded as well, turned towards the highwaymen and cried:

"We surrender—we surrender, upon condition that you save us from the brutality of the prisoners!"

This supplication was at once granted.

At the command of Dick, the officers unharnessed the two remaining horses, mounted them as best they could, carrying their wounded companions with them, and so they made their escape; for, as Dick said, he could not possibly hope to exercise much control over the men who had been liberated, and who, for the most part, were quite unworthy of receiving such a benefit.

But in the haste and hurry of the moment, Dick and his comrades overlooked a most important circumstance.

They ought to have taken care what the officers had ridden off in the direction of London, as then there would have been less danger of meeting with assistance; as it was, they were permitted to gallop off in precisely the opposite direction.

The coast was now quite clear, and Dick called out, in a loud voice:

"Tom Davis—Tom Davis, where are you? Speak out! We are your friends come to your assistance!"

There was no reply.

The highwaymen looked uneasy.

But just as they were beginning to wonder whether, after all, they had not made an awful mistake and released the wrong lot of prisoners, they heard a well-known voice say, faintly:

"Here I am, captain—here I am! I could not speak before—joy overcame me, and took away my voice."

Guided by the sound, Dick and his comrades made their way towards the back part of the van.

Then ensued an immediate hush and silence.

Those who had been thus unexpectedly released stood still and noiseless, in order that they might catch sight of their deliverers.

"Quick—quick!" cried Turpin, to them. "Do not dally, as you value your liberties! Fly—fly at once, or you will have the officers once more among you!"

The prospect of this event seemed to strike an immediate panic to their hearts.

With one rapid and simultaneous rushing movement, they turned round, and, with incredible swiftness, disappeared in the darkness.

They dispersed in all directions, so that it would be no easy task for the officers to capture them now.

But Dick soon ceased to observe them.

His attention was concentrated upon a single object.

This was Tom Davis, who still seemed thoroughly overcome.

All at once, however, he started to his feet, and sprang towards Dick Turpin, whose hands he seized upon with a frenzied grasp.

Despite Dick's resistance, he carried them to his lips, pressed them to his bosom, and displayed a thousand frantic emotions of joy and gratitude.

Then, sinking down upon one knee, he said:

"Captain—captain, my life now is yours—do with it whatever you think fit! I could not believe that you would forsake one who has proved true to you after so many have proved false! And yet this was more—far more than I dared hope for—nay, more than I deserved, for you have all perilled your lives for me."

"Nonsense—nonsense, Tom!" cried Dick Turpin, in careless tones. "You might have known that we should not abandon you to your fate without making at least an effort to save you. Rise—rise! Quit that position, for we must fly at once if we mean to secure your safety!"

With much difficulty, Tom Davis was prevailed upon to rise to his feet, and even then he continued to pour out his protestations of gratitude.

His state of mind is easily understood, for he had been suddenly and unexpectedly transported from the lowest depths of despair to the very summit of hope.

He had given himself up for lost when, on leaving Newgate, he was placed with the rest in the hearse-like prisoners' van.

Now, almost with the suddenness of enchantment, he was a free man.

The change was almost enough to overpower anyone.

With what rapidity they could, they mounted their horses, Tom Davis being first accommodated with a seat behind Dick Turpin.

It was then found that Sixteen-String Jack had been wounded in the conflict.

The others had sustained no greater injuries than a few scratches, and these were of so insignificant a character that they were not worth talking about.

Jack, however, had been struck in the left shoulder by a pistol bullet.

At first he had thought nothing of it whatever, believing the wound to be much less serious than it proved.

Now, however, that he had had time to grow somewhat cool, he found, upon attempting to move, that his shoulder was perfectly still and the least change of position was the cause of intolerable pain.

So great was the anguish caused by the exertion of mounting his horse that he almost fell from the saddle after he had seated himself, owing to the deathlike feeling of faintness and dizziness that came over him.

Claude was the first to notice this circumstance, and he cried out:

"Jack—Jack, you are hurt more severely than you gave us to understand!"

"I—I—fear I am."

"I am sure you are."

"I should be better, I think, if you could bandage my wound up with my neckcloth. Now I have moved, I can feel it has begun to bleed afresh."

"By all means do so," said Dick Turpin, who, nevertheless, felt rather uneasy at the delay that must of necessity occur.

But Claude Duval was very expeditious in his movements.

It was by no means the first time that he had bandaged a wound, though this time the difficulty of the operation was much increased, owing to Jack's position on horse-back, and he would by no means allow him to alight, for his experience told him that it is dressing of the wound would cause a renewal of the sensation of lancet; moreover, there would be the danger of shifting the bandage in the act of mounting.

A piece of the linen was first torn off his neck both and soaked in water, plenty of which was trickling down the sides of the rocks.

This piece was folded square and placed upon the wound, and the neckcloth bound tightly over the whole.

"There," said Claude Duval, "it is true a professed surgeon might have made a better job of it perhaps, but I question whether it would have been more effectual in stanching the blood."

At this moment the attention of all was aroused by hearing on the road the clatter of horses' feet.

"The officers at last!" ejaculated Dick. "I have been expecting them for some time! Forward—forward!"

"Ride on first," said Claude Duval; "you carry a double burden. I shall have time to complete my operations."

"No, no," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you shall not run any risk of fresh danger on my behalf; I shall do very well as I am."

"Be quiet!" said Claude. "Save your strength for something better than mere words."

"Yes," said Dick, "go on with your task; we will neither of us start until it is completed."

It would have greatly annoyed anyone to have seen how coolly Claude Duval proceeded with his task; one would have thought that there was no occasion for haste at all.

But those who watched him closely would have seen that this slowness was only apparent, and was caused by his extreme calmness.

That he was, on the contrary, very rapid in his movements was evinced by the few seconds it took him to finish properly bandaging the wound.

Nevertheless, by that time the officers had now got very close to the highwaymen.

Looking along the road, the officers could plainly be distinguished coming along like a cloud, though it was questionable whether they could see the highwaymen as yet, because our friends were standing in the deep shadow of the holloway.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUFFER THEMSELVES TO BE LULLED INTO A STATE OF FALSE SECURITY.

"ARE you ready, Claude?" asked Dick.

"Yes, quite."

"Forward, then—forward, then! We have not a second to lose! Follow me!"

As he spoke, Dick Turpin turned Black Bess's head in the direction of London.

But he did not long pursue this course.

He availed himself of the first lane he came to being anxious to get fairly into the open country.

The turning down the lane, however, was not accomplished without being seen by the officers, who, observing the movement, uttered a cry of gratification.

They did not dare to expect that they should be able to overtake the fugitives; but they did hope to be able to keep upon their track, and not lose sight of them.

As was generally his custom in such a case as the present, Dick Turpin urged his mare onwards to the full extent of her power, being aware that a sharp push for a short time would not be likely to fatigue her so much as a long gallop at something like an ordinary rate of speed.

Although Black Bess carried a double load, it was sur-

prising to see with what ease she maintained the lead.

The other horses had "the advantage, but yet they kept in the rear."

The speed they made, however, was something prodigious, and it is probable they would never have accomplished it but for the stimulus Black Bess was to them.

The officers were quickly left in the rear; but yet, as the lane had gone winding on without branching off in any fresh direction, there could be no doubt that they were still fairly on the track.

This was a state of things, however, that Dick Turpin was resolved to put an end to.

Finding a five-barred gate some distance ahead which led into a field, he pulled up.

His companions hastened to follow his example, and when the commotion caused by their stoppage had died away, Dick assumed an attitude of listening.

"I can hear nothing of them," he said at length, "so it is fair to presume they cannot hear us—indeed, they may not be listening at this precise moment."

"Black Bess has carried her double load long enough, I think," responded Tom Klug.

"Yes, and you may take your turn next, if you have no objection," replied Dick.

"None in the world," was the answer. "Come Tom Davis, the sooner we are off again, I am sure, the better."

"Through the gate yonder," said Dick. "I will open it and close it securely afterwards. In the meanwhile, you push across the meadow; I will quickly overtake you."

"Shall you attempt to regain the ruins to-night?"

"I think not; it would be unwise, for at the most we cannot count upon more than an hour's darkness."

"Scarcely that."

"But I was thinking of Jack's wound. If we could by any possibility get back it would be an advantage to him."

"Never mind me," murmured Sixteen-String Jack, faintly.

Tom replied, without taking any notice of the interruption.

"We can easily obtain some place of shelter where we can pass the day, then we can set out for the ruins at nightfall; rely upon it, that would be much the best in every way."

"It would be better for Jack," said Claude Duval. "The less exertion he goes through during the next few hours the better, and the sooner he will recover."

"That is sufficient to decide me. Quick! On—on, or we shall have the officers at our heels again! Once through the gate we shall be tolerably safe from their pursuit, for they will, ten to one, ride on."

Not another moment was lost in carrying out Dick Turpin's suggestions.

The gate was opened, the little party passed through, and Dick carefully closed it after them, so that there was actually nothing whatever to induce the officers to suppose that the fugitives had passed that way.

Rapidly mounting, he rode after his comrades.

Trifling as was the delay caused by fastening the gate yet, as his companions had put their horses to speed, it had enabled them to get a long way in advance.

But Black Bess seemed to pass over three yards while they passed over two, so that very quickly indeed she was in her accustomed place in front.

Dick then checked her speed, and as he did so, and thought how quickly she had outstripped the rest, he could not help the reflection occurring to him that had he been alone he could easily have regained the ruins before daylight, and so have saved Maud many hours of anguished suspense.

Somehow, whenever he thought of her he experienced a strange tightening at the chest and heaviness of heart, which made him dread that some evil had befallen her.

And yet in the next breath he would ask himself what harm could happen to her there.

Certainly none.

The only fear was that she might find the solitude insupportable and quit the protection of the ruins.

In this case it was hard to say what harm might happen.

So much did this feeling of uneasiness grow upon him

In spite of all the strenuous efforts he made to banish it, that he felt almost inclined to propose to his comrades that he should gallop off alone, and leave them to follow at their leisure.

But this looked by far too much like deserting his friends to make Dick feel inclined to adopt it, and so he rode on, though his impatience was manifested by the long distance he kept in advance of his comrades, who continued to press forward with all the speed their horses were capable of.

In this manner they continued their journey on across the open country without meeting with any interruption till morning dawned.

Where they were was rather a difficult thing to ascertain, and Dick began to look around him accordingly, in the hope of being able to recognise some features of the landscape.

But no—all was strange to him, and to the best of his belief it was a portion of the country he had never before been in.

Upon making inquiry of his companions he found them to be equally at fault.

"No matter," he answered. "In all probability before going much further we shall find a little habitation where we can ask for shelter without fear of being recognised."

"Yes, surely no resident of this part could be familiar with our outward appearance."

"I should think not."

During this brief consultation the little party had halted upon the summit of a piece of gently-rising ground, from which a tolerably extensive view of country could be obtained.

It was growing lighter every moment now, and the longer they gazed more objects came into view.

Raising his arm and pointing straight before him, Tom King exclaimed:

"Look, Dick, I fancy among those trees I can perceive a thin wreath of smoke curling up as though from a cottage fire freshly lighted!"

Upon looking in the direction indicated, Dick perceived that his companion was right.

"Shall we make our way towards it?" asked Tom King. "It seems to be in a very sheltered situation, and therefore just the place for us on that very account."

"Yes," said Dick, "that will suit as well as anywhere, no doubt."

Accordingly they set out for the cottage, the thin wreath of bright blue smoke curling upwards enabling them to direct their course with great precision.

The scenery around was truly delightful, and from every bush and tree birds could be heard pouring out their twittering melodies, to which the murmuring of water and the rustling of the tree-tops made an excellent accompaniment.

Gazing upon such a scene, it was hard to believe that there could be in the world such things as strife and crime.

As they rode on there was not one of the group that was not amenable to the influences of this sweet morning in early spring.

As they drew nearer to the hut or cottage the harmony of the scene was rudely broken in upon and disturbed by the sound of harsh, discordant voices engaged in quarrelling.

Our friends heard this long before the habitation itself came into view.

At last, breaking through the trees, they saw before them a little thatch-covered building of picturesque appearance.

In front and at the rear was a large piece of garden ground, which showed signs of having once been in the highest state of cultivation, but now everything had a forlorn, neglected look.

At one time, and certainly not long ago, the front of the house had been ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine, which had been made to twine all over it, but now their long branches trailed upon the ground in the utmost disorder.

Near the garden gate were a couple of children, a boy and a girl, both of whom were crying bitterly.

The sounds of contention that had come from within now abruptly ceased.

Probably those engaged in the wordy war had looked through the windows and witnessed the arrival of the newcomers.

This was no doubt the case, for at the door two specimens of humanity made their appearance.

One was a man of particularly brutal and sinister aspect, although there lingered about him indications which to a close observer pointed to the fact that he had once been a very different individual.

Behind him, shading the light from her eyes in order to take a better view of their visitors, was a dirty, untidy woman—undoubtedly the wife of the man.

Dick Turpin, as may be guessed, was by no means pleased with the exterior of these people, and wished from the bottom of his heart that they had turned some other way.

There was no positive reason why they should not ride on and seek some other place, but a second's reflection told Dick that it was the best and wisest course to keep out of sight as much as possible.

These people had seen him, and he was determined if possible that they should be the only ones who would.

Therefore, controlling that disgust which he could with difficulty prevent from showing in his countenance, he said:

"We are travellers, as you see, and have been so unfortunate as to lose our way in the darkness; we have wandered I know not how many miles, and have not been able to find a human habitation of any kind except this cottage of yours, which we deem ourselves lucky in having lighted upon. We are now quite weary, and should be glad if you would allow us shelter for a little while in order that our horses and ourselves may obtain a rest."

This was a very long speech for Dick to make, but he paused frequently in order to give, as he thought, an opportunity of speaking or of offering that for which he was in the end obliged to ask.

He might have spoken for an hour resultlessly, for even after he had finished there was no reply whatever made.

The man and woman looked in each other's faces and seemed to be having a silent conversation between themselves—most likely as to whether an affirmative or negative answer should be returned.

At last, with considerable awkwardness and embarrassment, the man said:

"If your honors don't mind taking up with such an untidy place as ours is—"

"It will suit us very well," said Dick. "We are quite exhausted, so make no more apologies."

"I was only going to say," continued the man, "that not very far from here there is a decent inn, where you would find much better accommodation than we can give; there are also stables where your horses could be fed."

Dick's determination to keep as much out of sight as possible exerted its full influence on this occasion, and made him resolve to refuse this tempting offer.

"We will go there if you like," said Dick, "but we prefer staying here to going even a yard further, we are so completely knocked up—so if you like to do your best, rely upon it we will pay you well for the accommodation."

These last words appeared to be productive of great effect.

"It shall be just as your honours like," replied the man—"it is not for such as me to dictate to you."

While the man was giving utterance to these not very hospitable words the whole party alighted.

It was now for the first time that it struck Dick that the fact of one of their horses carrying a double burden was, to say the least of it, a suspicious circumstance.

This might perhaps account to some extent for the surliness of the man's behaviour.

What plausible explanation to give Dick did not know, therefore very wisely determined to pass it over in silence.

The highwaymen all regretted that there was no accommodation for their horses, but this could not be helped, so they had to submit to it.

The man, upon promise of reward, however, undertook to obtain for them a plentiful supply of fresh green grass.

Our friends now entered the cottage, and found that the interior corresponded well with the exterior, for it was a complete picture of dirt and neglect.

That the woman was not dead to its condition was proved by her apologies.



[THE DREADFUL FATE OF MAUD'S COMPANION.]

"Ah, gentlemen, this is a sorry place for you to put your heads in, is it not?" she exclaimed, heaving a deep sigh while she spoke. "It was not always so, however, though I am in despair of any change for the better taking place again. It's drink that's done all this, sir—nothing but drink. My husband was the best man in the whole country-side until he became what he is now—a confirmed, hopeless drunkard. It will bring us to the workhouse yet, for I have followed his bad example, and am little better than he is, though I take shame to myself for saying it. But, then, if it was not for the drink stupefying me, how do you think I could bear all this?"

The woman paused in her gossip, and with her apron wiped the tears from her eyes.

The cottage was divided into two rooms, and into the inner one she now proceeded to usher the highwaymen.

It had no doubt been called at one time the parlour, but now most of the articles it had contained had been

carried away, though still it was a comfortable apartment contrasted with the other.

It was not likely that our friends would fare very well in such quarters as these, yet they managed to make a tolerable meal.

Their success, however, and the belief that they were now in a position of absolute safety, caused them to forget that amount of caution which they generally exercised, for they talked loudly, and called one another by their names without the least reserve.

As the day wore on, they one by one felt a great drowsiness come over them, to which the profound silence around in no slight degree contributed.

The woman, who, like all her sex, was curious in the highest degree, crept cautiously close to the door, and, applying her ear to the keyhole, listened intently.

She had little difficulty in making out what was uttered.

After listening for some time, she rose, and quitted the house.

She glanced around for her husband, and caught sight of him carrying some fodder to the horses.

"Jack, you lazy, drunken villain," she said, in a suppressed voice, "come here!"

"What now?" he growled. "What do you want to be throwing that in my teeth for ever?"

"You deserve it, you idle wretch! Come here, I say! What was that I heard you talking about the other day? You know what I mean—about those robbers?"

"What robbers?" said the man, sulkily, having apparently paid but slight attention to his wife's words.

"You know very well what robbers without asking. I mean Dick Turpin, and all that lot."

"Don't bother."

"But I shall, you idle sot! What reward did you tell me was offered for them?"

"Why, somewhere about three thousand pounds, I think. But why do you ask?" he added, struck by the unusual expression upon his wife's countenance.

"Because," said she, clutching him by the arm so tightly that her nails were almost buried in the flesh—"because they are all four in the house now, and another man with them, whom they call Tom Davis."

Having made this communication, she released her hold upon her husband's arm.

He staggered back aghast with surprise.

"How do you know, you witch?" he at last gasped out.

"Be quiet, fool; they will hear you!"

"But how do you know it?"

"I have been listening at the door, and have heard them talking."

This was so rational and probable a source of knowledge that the man could not utter another word.

He sat down upon a log hard by, and rubbed his forehead vigorously.

It was more than his mind could take in at once.

"Now, dolt," cried his wife, "do you know what you must do?"

He gazed blankly at her.

"Listen to me and I will tell you," she added. "You must make the best of your way to the nearest place where you are likely to find any officers—don't speak a word to anyone on the way, mind, or you will lose the reward—then tell them to come here."

"And perhaps by that time they will have left."

"No fear of that if you make haste. They seem very tired, and some are actually going to sleep, so you cannot have a better chance. They are sure to stay an hour or two; but make as much haste as you can."

Upon this the man rose from his seat and prepared to start.

Just then his eyes happened to alight upon the horses, and as they did so his face brightened as though he had been struck by a capital idea.

"Hain't I better take one of those horses?" he said. "I could be back then in half the time."

"No, you fool," was the reply, "you had better do nothing of the sort! Ten to one if they did not hear you, and then it will be all up at once; and one might pop out while you are away and then what could I tell them? and besides, you have never been across a horse's back in your life, you looby, so how can you ride. I should like to know?"

The woman's words were poured out with that particular amount of fluency for which the feminine organs of speech are so remarkable.

The last point seemed to settle the matter.

"Make haste, you besotted idiot," she muttered, "and never mind bothering your own stupid brains; just attend to me—that is all you have to do! Be off, I say—be off without another word!"

With these words ringing in his ears, the man hurried off, while the woman, in a perfect fever, returned to the house.

All was silent in the inner room, or parlour, as she always called it.

The fact was, the whole of the party was asleep with the exception of Sixteen-String Jack, the pair of whose wound prevented from slumbering, therefore he had undertaken to keep good watch and ward while his companions reposed themselves.

But even the silence was not without its effect on him, for he was greatly fatigued, and every now and then he dozed off for a few moments; but the intolerable smarting of his wound would make him start awake again.

At length, desirous to shake off his drowsiness, he rose and gently opening the door, stepped out.

The woman no sooner saw him than she appeared overcome with terror.

Jack noticed her confusion, but was very far from suspecting the cause of it.

Passing out quickly, he made his way to where the horses were standing.

The animals were perfectly safe and quiet, and apparently tolerably comfortable.

Observing that all the grass was eaten, he looked around him for the man, and not seeing him, went back towards the front door of the house.

"My good woman," he said, "where is your husband?"

"My husband, sir?" she said, her voice quivering like some extraordinary musical instrument out of tune—"my—my—husband, sir?"

"Yes!" said Jack, speaking rather angrily, for he would just then gave him a terrific twinge. "Where is he? Where's he gone, I say? What's the matter with you? Are you struck dumb or what?"

CHAPTER MXI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN RETURN TO THE RUINS AND MEET WITH A SURPRISE OF AN UNEXPECTED CHARACTER.

How true it is that a guilty conscience stands in need of no accuser!

The woman jumped at once to the conclusion that Jack had fathomed all, without pausing to think how highly improbable it was that such should be the case.

Her hesitation and confusion went far towards changing suspicion into certainty.

Jack eyed her closely.

"I—I am not drunk, sir," the woman managed to articulate at last; "but you spoke so sudden and sharp-like, that I thought something must be the matter, and felt frightened."

Jack was only half satisfied with this explanation.

"Where is your husband, woman? Why do you not answer me that question?"

"I—I thought he was outside. He—he must have gone to look for some more food for the horses."

"It may be so," said Jack, "for they require it, and I was going to tell him to seek for some at once."

The woman drew a long breath of relief.

Finding that her worst expectations had not been realised, she recovered her usual calmness and presence of mind with wonderful rapidity.

"Shall I go and look for him, and tell him what you say? I daresay I can find him."

"Yes, do so. If our horses are not fed we cannot complete our journey."

Without another word the woman withdrew.

Jack stood at the front door and watched her take her departure.

He was unable to see her for long, however, as the dense masses of trees around quickly hid her from his view.

How long he remained leaning idly against the door-post Sixteen-String Jack had no conception, for he seemed to fall off into a drowsy half-slumber, during which he was just conscious of where he stood and nothing more.

When at length he started up wide awake, he found the setting sun shining redly in his face.

At first he was dazzled and half blinded with the glare, but putting his hands to his eyes to screen off the ardent rays, he perceived the woman approaching.

She was alone.

"Have you found your husband?" Jack asked, as she came nearer.

"Yes," was the reply. "All is well. He will be here in a short time."

If Jack had known exactly how long he had stood at the door his suspicions would have had full force.

As it was he turned round and entered the room where he had left his companions.

The noise he made in entering aroused them.

They all looked up inquiringly.

"Well," said Dick, who was the first to speak, "how now, Jack? Is all well?"

"I scarcely know how to answer you," said Jack, in a faint whisper, for the conviction irresistibly came over him that the woman was listening at the door. "But the man has gone off somewhere—perhaps, for aught I know, to betray us."

"Pooh—pooh, Jack," returned Turpin, "there is no fear of that. How is he to know us? Just tell us that."

Jack was silent.

"It's your wound," added Dick. "It has made you feel nervous and unnecessarily alarmed. Sit down and calm yourself. We will make another levy upon the provisions in this house, and then we will depart. By then darkness will have fairly set in."

Sixteen-String Jack was not, however, in the least inclined to sit down.

He walked to the window and looked out.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"Look—look!" he ejaculated. "This is just exactly what I feared and expected."

"What—what?"

"We are betrayed! Yonder is a troop of police officers! Quick—quick! If we are speedy we may be able to mount and ride away."

This intelligence was so startling and unexpected, that for a second or so it had a paralyzing influence upon all present.

Then simultaneously they rushed to the window, as though unable to credit the statement that had just been made by Jack.

One glance, however, served to dissipate every doubt.

A troop of police officers were just emerging from the trees.

They did not stay to count them; but from the bulk of the throng their numbers could not have been much, if any, under a dozen.

They were every one well mounted, and by their manner it was evident that they were approaching stealthily in order that they might take the highwaymen all the more by surprise.

There could be no doubt in the minds of the highwaymen as to the person by whom they had been betrayed, for the man was walking in front of the officers, and pointing excitedly in the direction of the cottage.

Dick's course of action was decided upon in a moment.

"Come, my friends," he said; "I do believe it is possible for us to get round to the place where our horses stand without being seen by these fellows. If so, we shall be off and away before they are aware of it, and shall in consequence obtain so good a start that by nightfall there is every probability that we shall elude them altogether."

"Come on, then!" cried Tom King. "Do not let us waste another moment."

As he spoke, Tom hastened to the door, and placed his hand upon the latch.

In an instant he discovered the door was fast.

"Caged!" he shouted. "The door is locked!"

"Stand aside, then!" said Claude Duval.

Tom did so, for he guessed what his comrade was about to do.

Gathering up all his energies, Claude Duval rushed across the room, and bore with full force against the door with his shoulder.

It turned out that he put forth about three times as much force as was necessary.

He had not taken into consideration the flimsy construction of the door, and the consequence was that no sooner did his shoulder strike against it than it flew open with great suddenness.

Claude could not stop himself, and, indeed, before he well knew what had happened, he was half-way across the outer apartment.

In his headlong course he came in contact with the woman, who had not time enough to get out of the way.

Down she went, as if struck by a cannon ball, and down went Claude as well, after making several futile efforts to retain his footing.

Despite the peril of their position, our friends could not forbear a hearty burst of laughter at this incident.

It was clear, however, that the noise of the scuffle had reached the ears of the police officers, for they could now be seen coming across the open space very rapidly indeed.

"Quick!" said Dick Turpin, as he observed this circumstance—"quick, or we shall, after all, be too late. Through yonder window—that will be the best and nearest way. The officers may not see us at all until after we are mounted. Quick—quick!"

Dick Turpin set his companions the example as well as issued his directions.

Flinging open a small window, he sprang through it with remarkable dexterity, and found himself close to Black Bess.

"Now, Tom Davis," he exclaimed, "come on! I fancy you had better share my saddle."

In less time than anyone would have deemed possible, the highwaymen were all fairly seated in their saddles, though a slight delay had taken place owing to Sixteen-String Jack having but one arm at liberty.

The police officers, however, must have guessed the highwaymen's design, for they came galloping up at full speed, and, despite all the expedition our friends had used, they found themselves threatened with a hand-to-hand encounter.

This was by no means what they desired, and no sooner had Dick seen that Jack was safely seated in the saddle than he gave the word for an immediate rush.

This was obeyed, though the officers set up a loud shout, in which the word "Surrender!" could be detected.

Not the least notice was taken of it by the highwaymen, however, who bent all their energies to get clear from the present embarrassing situation.

Finding no regard paid to them, the officers discharged a volley from their pistols, and set off in immediate pursuit.

The first act was a very thoughtless and inconsiderate one, but it was performed upon the impulse of the moment.

When the pistols were discharged the fugitives were well out of range.

Consequently no harm was done.

It was fortunate that the trees grew so close at hand, for Dick was thus enabled to get himself and his comrades out of sight of their pursuers almost immediately.

Still, he was careful not to penetrate too deeply into the recesses of the trees, lest they should suddenly encounter some obstacle to their progress.

The police officers, however, were by far too resolute and too close behind them to be shaken off very easily or rapidly.

Dick Turpin nevertheless experienced but a slight amount of uneasiness.

Every moment the shades of evening grew darker and darker, for by this time the sun had dipped below the horizon.

In a short time, however, the confines of the wood were reached, and a vast extent of open country lay spread out before them.

Dick paused a moment, in order to allow Tom Davis to change to Tom King's horse.

The officers could not be very far in the rear, but at present the trees hid them from sight, while the soft turf which was growing everywhere prevented the hoof-beats of their horses from being heard.

"I think the best plan now will be to push on with all the speed our horses are capable of making," said Dick Turpin. "And, if we are careful to make a considerable detour, I believe we shall be able to reach the ruins unperceived, while the period of our arrival need not be later than midnight."

"As you like, captain—you shall decide."

"Forward, then!" cried Dick, without another second's hesitation.

It was perfectly certain, though, that, let them use what speed they might, it would be impossible to get so far away as to be out of sight of the officers, who they expected each moment to see make their appearance among the trees.

The speed at which our friends started off, however,

was such that in a very little while they got over a great deal of ground.

Looking back, however, Dick perceived that the officers had by no means abandoned the chase, nor did they show any indications of being about to cease their endeavours.

That they would be able to come up with our friends was most unlikely, however, for almost at each moment it could be seen that the distance between them had increased.

As they journeyed thus rapidly along that feeling of uneasiness and impatience to which we have before adverted again filled Dick's breast, and this time the intensity of the feeling was increased tenfold.

His imagination busily suggested a thousand evils which might have happened in his absence, and as he went the presentiment of some great grief and danger in store pressed more and more heavily upon his spirits.

In vain he tried, as before, to banish these sensations.

They seemed to laugh at all his efforts.

In such a state of mind as we have faintly and imperfectly described the rapid motion was a relief rather than otherwise, though to his feverish mind the speed at which they went seemed tediously and insufferably slow.

The desire to reach the ruins with as little delay as might be caused him not to make so considerable a detour as he had at first proposed, although by doing so, as he was well aware, he voluntarily courted danger.

His comrades noticed the change in his course with some surprise; but they had undertaken to leave the carrying out of the affair in his hands, and they had so high an opinion of his abilities in such a matter that they never once for a moment thought of making any comment upon it.

The pursuing officers were by this time completely out-distanced, and this circumstance made a great difference.

In the midst of all his terrible forebodings, Dick did not forget what he had overheard respecting the roads being watched, in order that he might be intercepted, and therefore, to guard against any possibility of coming into collision with his foes, he directed his course in such a manner that the ruins were left considerably on his right hand.

He rode on, bending round slightly, and at length, with a sigh of relief, made his way in a direct line to the place he wished to reach, though, as well as he understood, he approached in precisely the opposite direction to what he expected.

He congratulated himself upon having adopted this course, for they met with no opposition whatever.

They did not so much as catch sight of a single living being.

But as he drew nearer and nearer to the ruins, instead of increasing his pace in order that he might all the sooner put an end to the suspense he had been so long enduring, an unaccountable feeling made him tighten his hold upon the rein, until Black Bess's speed was reduced to a walk.

He did not attempt to analyse this feeling, but he seemed irresistibly impelled to act in the manner we have described.

"Hullo!" said Tom King, pressing forward a little. "What is the matter, captain? Why are you pulling up?"

Just as he spoke he happened to catch sight of Dick's countenance.

He was so struck by its aspect that he immediately added:

"Why, what on earth is the matter, ~~what~~? You seem as though you had seen a ghost! Can it be possible that you are hurt?"

"No—no, Tom, it is not that. I am almost ashamed to confess it; but if you will believe, my heart is so heavily oppressed that it seems as though it would weigh me down."

"But what is the ~~case~~, captain?" asked Claude Duval, who was close enough behind to overhear what had passed.

"I fear that—that while we have been away some great calamity has happened, of what nature I cannot even guess; but so strongly has the presentiment taken hold

of me that I positively dread to approach any nearer, because—because I feel some terrible discovery awaits me."

"Why, Dick," said Tom King, after a long pause, for, to tell the truth, he scarcely knew how to reply, "I thought you were one never troubled by any such fancies."

"Fancies or not," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I should be the last to disregard them. Still, let us approach. Knowing the worst will not be so bad as this state of terrible suspense, with our suspicions suggesting all manner of terrible occurrences."

"Jack says rightly," observed Claude. "Come, Dick, shake off this heaviness—let us approach."

Thus urged, Dick Turpin once more pushed Black Bess forwards at a better speed.

There was one spot where, on nearly every occasion when they returned, they had found Jack the ostler waiting for them.

It was a kind of out-post in the ruins, from which a view of considerable extent could be obtained.

This time he was not to be seen.

His absence struck a chill to the breasts of everyone—it seemed so like a confirmation of Dick's forebodings.

It was a moment before anyone could speak, and then Dick said:

"How strange it is that Jack Ostler is not here to meet us as usual!"

His voice was unsteady and constrained.

"It is," returned Tom; "but push on. It may be that Maud feels disinclined to remain alone in the ruins."

Dick shook his head at this supposition.

He knew full well that Maud's anxiety would be equal to, if not greater, than his own.

So far from making any such excuse, he thought she would be the first to place herself at the nearest point, and watch untiringly for his return.

With a thousand more apprehensions than before, Dick continued on his way.

By this time his apprehensions were fully shared in by his companions, so highly contagious is everything resembling fear.

It might have been fancy in a great measure, and yet to them it seemed as though there was an unusual air of desolation pervading the place—

A desolation and silence which they had never before noticed.

A few minutes brought them to the courtyard, where, at least, Dick felt certain Maud would be watching for his arrival.

But this spot seemed even more silent and deserted than elsewhere.

Without a word, Dick alighted from his steed.

He did not speak, but all could see how deeply his heart was moved, and they knew that such feelings as he then experienced could not be expressed in words.

Silently, then, they too followed his example.

At length, in a faltering voice, Tom ventured to suggest that both Maud and Jack had for a short time descended into the secret chamber.

Dick shook his head.

"That is a point soon enough ascertained," said Dick. "Follow me."

"Shall we lead the horses after us, or leave them here?"

"Better leave them here. They are familiar enough with the place not to stray away. If it turns out as you suggest, they will quickly be attended to."

From this speech it was evident that Dick Turpin was doing his best to cheat himself into the belief that Tom King's suggestion was likely to prove correct.

The horses were released, though no attempt was made to remove any of their trappings.

The animals justified the remark that had been made.

They were familiar with the place, and showed no disposition to stray off.

Indeed, Black Bess seemed more than half inclined to follow at her master's heels; but after going a little distance she, at a word from him, came to a halt.

In perfect silence, then, and with heavy, slow, lingering footsteps, the highwaymen made their way in the direction of the entrance to the subterranean apartment.

To reach it took them little more than a moment.

The aperture was not closed, and this discovery caused a thrill of delight to shoot through their frames, for it did indeed seem as though Maud and Jack the ostler were below.

"It's all right," said Tom. "Go on, Dick; you had better be the first. They will be surprised at our return; rely upon it, they did not expect us back so soon."

"Maud—Maud!" cried Dick, as he began to descend. "Maud—Maud, speak to me—let me hear your voice! Maud, I say! I have returned in safety and unhurt!" Dick paused.

His heart beat violently.

A cold perspiration started forth in large drops upon his forehead, while he gasped painfully and laboriously for breath, as though his lungs had suddenly refused to perform their proper functions.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, his voice seeming rather to burst from his lips than to be a natural articulation. "What can be the meaning of this? What—oh, what can have happened?"

"Descend—descend!" cried Claude Duval. "Be quick! We can ascertain nothing here; or stand aside, if you would rather, and I will go first and lead the way."

"No—no!" groaned Dick, while they could see that he trembled from head to foot like an aspen. "My worst forebodings are now realised! This was the direction in which all my ghastly fears pointed! Alas!—alas!—what is to be done?"

"Descend—descend!" said Tom King, in a scarcely less agitated voice than that of his leader.

His injunction was complied with.

The whole party slowly descended the flight of steps, and with faltering steps made their way along the passage.

It was at this moment that, with a triumphant shout, or rather yell, of exultation, an officer dashed round from one of the corners of the ruins, where evidently he had been in hiding.

He was followed quickly by a dense throng of others, who exhibited scarcely less frantic demonstrations of excitement than himself.

They clustered round the entrance to the underground apartment.

Then the first, who was no other than Bishop the police officer, threw his hands up above his head and screamed aloud:

"Caged—caged! I knew it would be done! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Earthed—earthed—run to earth! I told you so! Caught—caught! Caught at last!"

CHAPTER MXII.

EXPLAINS THE APPEARANCE OF THE POLICE OFFICERS AT THE RUINS.

To explain the mysterious disappearance of Maud and Jack the ostler, and the no less mysterious appearance of Bishop and a troop of officers, it will be necessary to go back and relate sequentially what took place at the castle ruins after the departure of Dick Turpin and his comrades.

We have said already that Maud stood and gazed after her husband until the stonework hid him from her sight.

But she continued to gaze long after that, for in fancy he was yet present to her vision.

Jack Ostler withdrew to a distance, leaving her to herself.

When afterwards she came to give an account of what had happened, she was unable to give anything like a clear idea of how long she might have remained in this position.

Her thoughts wandered, and she gave herself up to a kind of waking day-dream.

She was longing for the time when Dick would leave England with her, and when there would succeed to this turbulent career a period of peace and rest.

Suddenly, however, her attention was aroused by a sound which instantly put all her dreams to flight.

It was only by the exercise of the greatest self-control that she was able to suppress a shriek.

The sound which struck upon her ear was the one above all others to cause her the most alarm.

It was a human voice.

At first she might have been incredulous, but soon there was no room left for the least amount of doubt.

The sound of voices continued, and Maud quickly became conscious that more than one person was approaching the ruins.

How many more she could not estimate.

Her heart fairly stood still.

The feeling was an awful one.

In vain she tried to draw her breath.

In vain she strove to move.

Then she became conscious that she was about to fall into a swoon.

This knowledge enabled her by a sudden effort to regain possession over her almost paralysed faculties.

It was just as she thus recollected herself that she found Jack the ostler was standing by her side.

His presence was to her a source of infinite relief, for she had just been assuring herself that it was necessary for her to set out in quest of him.

Jack placed his fingers to his lips, in token of silence.

Then, in the faintest possible whisper, he murmured: "Don't be alarmed, but strangers have entered the ruins."

Maud nodded, and by her manner signified to him that she was already acquainted with the fact.

"There's three of them," he continued, in the same cautious tones, "and what they want I cannot imagine."

"They—they—are not——" gasped Maud.

"No—no," answered the ostler, without waiting for her to complete her question—"they are not police officers."

Maud involuntarily gasped:

"Thank Heaven!"

The knowledge that these new-comers were not police officers had a wonderfully reassuring effect upon her.

"Who can they be, then?" she murmured. "What can they want here?"

Jack shook his head.

"It will be best not to talk, miss," he said—he always called Maud "Miss"—"we may be overheard. Look there!"

He pointed across the ruins as he spoke.

Maud looked in the direction in which he pointed, and then saw three persons come into view.

One walked in advance of the other two, and by his costume it could be seen that he belonged to a higher grade of society than they did, while their manner showed that they were ready to do his bidding in anything that he required.

The first one came very near to the spot where Maud and Jack Ostler were concealed.

Indeed, they had to shrink back very closely into the shadow of an abutment to escape detection.

Even then they would have been in great danger of being seen but for the obscurity which prevailed, and which seemed to increase rapidly every moment.

The gentleman—for such by his attire he seemed to be—paused, and raising one arm, pointed towards the keep.

"There can be no doubt this is the place," he said—"not the least doubt in the world; but if I had known it was such a devilish long way off, I should have waited till the morning."

"What is to be done, then, sir?" asked one of the men, in a respectful voice.

"Done?—why, nothing at all can be done to-night—that is the worst of it."

"Shall we go back, sir?" asked the one who had before spoken.

"Wait a moment—I will think."

The stranger appeared to consider carefully for a minute or two, and then he replied:

"My orders were, not to leave this place until my task is completed; but, as I said before, it is no use attempting to commence to-night. You two shall stay here, however, and make yourselves as comfortable as you can, and I will ride on to the next village, and try if I can find any accommodation at an inn."

By the expression upon the countenances of the two men, it was quite evident that they by no means relished this proposition; but they were too much under the subjection of the stranger to utter even a word by way of remonstrance.

By the way the gentleman spoke it was clear that he intended to seek accommodation for himself only.

"You quite understand," he added. "On no account are you to quit these ruins even for a moment, and wait here till my return. I will be here by daybreak in the morning, and don't you stir till then—you know what the consequences will be if you disregard my injunctions. You have some provisions, so make yourselves as comfortable as you can."

"And the horses, sir?"

"Oh, they will be right enough—there is plenty of good grass about. Above all, mind what I have said."

With these words the gentleman turned on his heels and departed.

The men looked after him very sullenly, and as soon as ever he was out of sight, one said:

"Curse me, Isaac, if I like this job!"

"Nor, I," was the answer given by the other; "it was a fool's trick to start so late from London."

"We had better have come in the morning, that's certain."

"We must grin and abide by it, mate, I suppose."

"Come further into the place, then. Let us have a good look all over it first of all. It will serve to pass the time away."

The other assented, and the pair passed on into the courtyard, going so close to Maud and the ostler in doing so that it is a thousand wonders a discovery was not made.

Jack waited a moment or so after they had disappeared before he ventured to speak.

Then he said:

"I can't think who they are, miss, nor what they want here. It bothers me entirely."

"Alas," replied Maud, "I fear we shall be no longer able to find a shelter within these crumbling walls. The one who announced his intention of returning by daybreak seems to me to have some authority—perhaps he is the owner of the property."

"That's very likely," said Jack. "I never happened to think of that; but in the meantime, miss, what are we to do?"

"Alas, I know not!"

"Don't be down, miss—don't be down. If we think a little while we are sure to be right."

Jack's confident and cheerful manner was not without its effect upon Maud.

"I'll tell you what," Jack continued. "I can give these chaps a regular fright, and perhaps scare them off in that way."

Maud shook her head.

"That won't answer, Jack, because they would come again in the morning."

"True—true, we should be no gainers in the end, I can see."

Jack scratched his head with a puzzled air.

"It seems to me," said Maud, after a brief pause, and her heart beat hard and fast as she spoke—"it seems to me that the only course open to us is to follow them to Greenwich."

Jack looked very grave at this proposition.

"It would be running a very great danger," he said; "perhaps we might get the captain and the rest into trouble."

"Yes; but it will not do to let them arrive here while these strangers are here. They would be discovered."

"True again," said Jack, who was now quite unable to see his way out of the difficulty.

While in this state of indecision his attention was distracted by another sound.

This was most unmistakably the trampling of horses' feet, and of a considerable number.

They came nearer each moment.

"Fresh arrivals," said Jack, as he passed his hand over his face. "Sure, the place must be bewitched."

Maud trembled and turned very pale.

"Who can these be?" she gasped. "Surely they have not returned already."

"No—no, they are not back—besides, I can hear at least a dozen horses."

"A dozen?"

"Yes. Hush—hush!"

The horsemen were now very close at hand.

It was quite evident that the ruined castle was their destination.

In another moment they came into sight.

Their arrival had been heard by the two men, for they came out into the open space again with their countenances wearing an expression of the utmost surprise.

The new-comers were police officers, and they numbered something like a dozen.

"Surrender—surrender!" they cried, as soon as they caught sight of the two men. "Surrender, if you wish your lives to be spared!"

"We have no intention of resisting," said one of the men. "What on earth do you want with us?"

"Well, curse me, that's cool! Seize them, my lads—seize them!"

"Perhaps you will first of all be kind enough to show me your warrant?"

"Warrant? the idea of such a thing!" said the chief officer, who was no other than Bishop. "Well—well, I never heard a richer thing than that in my life—never!"

"You are all mad or drunk," said the other man, "or labouring under some strange mistake or other!"

"Nothing of the kind! Seize them!"

The order was promptly obeyed, for the men never offered to make the least resistance.

"Now, then, out with your lanterns."

Bishop fully believed that he had made an important capture, but the coolness of these men, and the quiet way in which they surrendered, caused him to have his doubts.

For this reason he called for the lanterns.

They were quickly produced.

Long and earnest was the scrutiny bestowed upon these two men, and in the end, though most unwillingly, Bishop was obliged to admit that he was very far indeed from having made the important capture he had imagined.

"Perhaps," said the man who had previously spoken—"perhaps now you will be good enough to explain all this? Pray, who did you take us for?"

His manner irritated Bishop excessively, and therefore, with ill-suppressed rage, he cried:

"You may consider yourselves in custody. Keep them secure, my men! Your presence at this hour in this place is sufficiently suspicious to warrant me in taking you prisoners."

"Oh, is it?" said the man, sarcastically. "I have always heard that police officers were promoted and placed in command in proportion as they showed themselves blundering and incompetent. I believe it now, and what is more, I am sure your talents fit you for the highest position in the force."

Bishop ground his teeth with rage—indeed, his anger was so great that it stifled him.

Had his life depended upon it he could not have uttered a syllable.

The man continued:

"You will please understand that we are here by the express commands of the Lord Chancellor, whose express commands to us were that we were to take up our quarters here, and on no account to leave—even for a moment. If you don't like to believe us you can run the risk of not doing so. The Chancellor's private secretary is now at the inn in the next village. He will be here again at daybreak. If you remove us from here you will forfeit your place, for not even ten times the amount of stupidity you possess would save you."

There was something so clear and distinct in this man's voice—something so calm and unruffled in his demeanour, that every word he uttered carried an impression of truth along with it.

There was not one of the officers—even including Bishop—but what was compelled into belief.

The latter at length commanded himself sufficiently to speak.

"What you say may or may not be true, but we have information that four highwaymen have been seen in this vicinity, and your looks are such as to raise suspicion in anyone's mind."

Bishop felt he had his antagonist there, for the man's outward appearance was certainly most unprepossessing.

"That may be," was the answer, "but if they looked people up on account of their looks you would never be out of jail."

"Come—come," said Bishop, biting his lips and en-
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striving to assume a calmness that he was far from feeling, "let us have no more of this. At the least I consider you ought to give a more satisfactory account of yourselves than you have yet done."

"I don't know what more you can want. I can only say that you will find every word we have uttered perfectly true."

"Tell him," said the other—"tell him all, or we shall have no peace."

"Well, then," said the man, "since you must know, this property belongs—or rather did belong, for he's dead now—to Lord Comynge. His daughter, a little girl, is now a ward in Chancery. Her uncle, who has for some time been known as Lord Comynge, is accused of attempting to murder his niece."

"Yes," said Bishop, interrupting him. "I have heard something of this before."

"Perhaps you have heard all, in which case I may as well save myself the trouble of talking as not."

"No—no. Go on, I beg."

"In the morning we are to make a thorough search, all over these ruins."

"What for?"

"Ah, that's just what we don't know."

"It seems like a matter in which police officers ought to be employed."

"But you see," replied the man, maliciously, "the Lord Chancellor happens to be of a precisely opposite opinion."

Bishop could make no reply to this hit, so he turned the conversation.

With an affectation of great communicativeness he exclaimed:

"The reason why we are here is, that from information we have received, we believe Dick Turpin and his gang have been secreting themselves somewhere in this neighbourhood, and this ruined castle struck is as being the most likely place."

Upon hearing these words, the two men exchanged significant glances.

Bishop's eyes were keen enough to perceive it, so he at once said:

"You know something of this."

"Well, it is not much, but from the look of the inside of the place I should say there have been several horses here for a length of time."

"Are they here now?"

"No, and I don't believe anyone else is, for we have had a good look around."

Bishop considered for some time in silence.

At last he said:

"Let me enter and have a look, I shall then be able to judge for myself."

With these words, Bishop and his companions followed the two men into the interior of the ruins.

It needed only a glance to convince the police officers that horses had been there, and very lately.

"We are on the scent at last," he cried, in an exultant voice. "Do you know we have been quite at a loss where to look, although we have known them to be in hiding somewhere."

"But I rather think the scent is cold," said the man Isaac.

"I don't believe they have left here yet," said Bishop, confidently.

"Why not?"

"Because they would never quit such a place of shelter unless driven from it."

"Then you think they will return?"

"Undoubtedly. Depend upon it, they are out upon some expedition, and will return here towards day-break."

"There is a good reward offered for their capture. Is there not?" asked Isaac's companion.

"Yes, very good," said Bishop. "And, if you like, we will share your watch in this place, and you shall take an equal share of the reward with the rest."

"Providing we are successful?"

"Yes, of course; but I don't feel very doubtful this time."

"Well, we agree," replied Isaac, after a brief whispered conference with his companion.

"Very well, then; we will say that is settled."

"Yes, quite."

"You say there is no one in the ruins but ourselves?"

"No one but ourselves, though, depend upon it, we have yet some discoveries to make."

"What is your meaning?"

"Why, you don't suppose these fellows kept out of doors all the time, do you? No, no—rely upon it there is some chamber or such-like place where they could make themselves tolerably comfortable."

"Of course not," said Bishop. "I wonder I did not think of that."

"So do I," said Isaac, in his usual sarcastic manner.

"However, let us set about it."

The police officers were by no means loth to comply with this proposition.

In one through the whole party passed into the recesses of the ruins, and, after dispersing themselves, they after a brief search discovered the entrance to the subterraneous chamber.

Indeed, it is rather wonderful they did not make the discovery earlier, for, owing to the sudden manner in which the secret apartment had been left, the highwaymen had omitted to close the entrance.

They would scarcely have thought such a thing necessary, as Maud was about to return to it in a short time.

The man who noticed the opening at once set up a loud shout, which had the immediate effect of assembling all the rest around him.

The exultation of Bishop knew no bounds, and no doubt his delight would have manifested itself in some extravagant manner or other but for the sarcastic observations of Isaac.

After a brief consultation held round the entrance to the subterranean chamber, it was decided that they should descend and make a thorough exploration.

Some little difficulty then arose as to who should be the one to lead the way.

Bishop, for his own part, was inclined to take up a general's position—that is, keep in the rear, so as to be as much out of danger as possible, but it was insisted on all hands that no one was so fit to lead the van as himself.

The jeers of Isaac made him unwilling to refuse.

It was, however, with no slight amount of reluctance that he began the descent of the steps.

He was by no means assured that the highwaymen had all left the ruins, and he was haunted by the terrible dread that, if really absent, the highwaymen might have left behind them some contrivance for bringing down death and destruction upon the head of any intruder.

It was, therefore, with very slow and cautious steps that he advanced.

Each moment, however, as he found no ill consequence ensue, his confidence increased.

At length they fairly stood within that little chamber wherein the highwaymen had passed so many hours in perfect security and freedom from interruption.

Here abundant proofs of their recent presence manifested themselves to the lynx-like eyes of the officers.

The result of their search convinced them that the whole of the highwaymen were really absent.

This being ascertained, they made their way once more to the upper air.

A consultation was now immediately held.

"The direction of this affair must be left to me!" cried Bishop, arrogantly. "And when you have heard the plan of operations I am about to propose I am sure you will agree with me that nothing better could by any possibility be devised."

"Well, that's modest, anyhow," observed Isaac, in his usual aggravating manner.

Bishop affected to take no notice of the remark, but spoke shortly and decisively to the point.

"Depend upon it," he said, "these fellows will come back if we are only careful to keep from them the knowledge that we are here. We will hide ourselves behind yonder wall, and on their arrival will wait until they have every one descended into the cavern—or whatever you like to call it. Then all we shall have to do will be to rush forward and surround the entrance. They will be completely at our mercy, and we shall make them prisoners with scarcely any trouble whatever. Let us

hear a better plan than that proposed," he added, giving a triumphant glance around, "and I will give in at once and for evermore."

CHAPTER XXIII

MAUD AND JACK THE OSTLER DETERMINE TO WARN DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES OF THEIR DANGER.

BISHOP paused, and he had the infinite satisfaction of finding that his plan was received with universal acclamation.

Not even Isaac raised a dissentient voice.

On the contrary, he liberally applauded the plan as being of all others the one best calculated to succeed.

In order that there might be no further difficulty, they at once withdrew to the place mentioned, which was exactly calculated to afford them safe shelter.

The horses were taken with them, and every precaution adopted to efface every trace that they or their animals might have left behind them.

Once having taken up their position behind the wall, several huge blocks of stone that had apparently fallen from the summit of a crumbling tower were rolled up into convenient situations, so as to serve them for seats.

Here they resolved to wait patiently for the arrival of their prey.

Leaving them here, we will revert to the proceedings of Maud and Jack the ostler.

After a little deliberation, they decided that it was most important that an effort should be made to overhear, if possible, the plans of their foes.

"If you will only stay here, miss," said Jack, "you will be perfectly safe. I will then creep on silently, and gather all the information I am able."

"No, no," said Maud—"I cannot remain here alone! Let me come with you!"

"But, miss, consider the extra danger."

"I will be cautious—very cautious! But do not ask me to remain here—anything would be preferable to that!"

Jack hesitated.

"Oh, stay," said Maud—"you remain here, and I will venture nearer to listen. I could not bear suspense."

As she spoke she moved forward.

Of course, Jack did not for one moment think of remaining behind.

Without uttering a syllable, he followed cautiously in Maud's steps.

All the time he was in an agony of dread lest the slight rustling of her dress should betray them to their foes.

But Maud was extremely careful, and at length was fortunate enough to approach sufficiently near to overhear every syllable.

She listened with the utmost dread and terror, though there was little fear Dick and the rest would arrive that night.

When the officers withdrew behind the wall and seated themselves upon the stones in the manner we have described, Jack endeavoured to persuade Maud to retreat.

But she refused to listen to any such suggestion, and changed her position, so that she was able once more to listen to their conversation.

The first words she caught were uttered by Bishop, who said:

"We have told you our business here, and a good thing it is for you, I consider, therefore you ought to satisfy our curiosity as to your presence in this place."

"We have little to tell," replied Isaac, "beyond what you know already. We have been sent down here on behalf of the little heiress, and we are thoroughly to search the ruins for something, but I know not what."

"Still you could hazard a shrewd guess?"

"Perhaps I could."

"Let us hear it, then."

"I don't know whether I ought to mention anything of the kind," was the hesitating reply.

"We have taken you into our confidence, so I don't see how you can with very good grace refuse."

Isaac was silent a moment or so; then, in a lower voice he said:

"Well, it is my own belief that somewhere among these ruins a large amount of money has been hidden, and in the morning when the Lord Chancellor's secretary arrives we shall have to search for it. Don't ask me for any more information, because if you do you won't get it."

"Very good," said Bishop. "But you might say whether what I have heard about Lord Comynge is correct or not."

"What is it?"

"Why, that he made an attempt upon the life of his niece."

"Yes, it was—in these very ruins."

"And that in consequence, although he stood so high in the favour of the King, he has been arrested on this capital charge?"

"Quite right," said Isaac. "But I don't suppose that result would have been brought about but for the Prince of Wales."

"Indeed. How so?"

"Why, you see, Lord Comynge has ever been his most bitter enemy, and done more towards estranging him from the King than all the world besides, therefore it may be chiefly on this account that he has taken up the case of the little heiress. Anyhow, he has declared that he will know no rest until he has seen her fully restored to her rights, and until her guardian has been justly punished for his crime."

At this moment Maud touched Jack upon the arm, and made a sign that she had heard enough, and was ready to retire.

Jack moved away with great readiness and willingness, for he was well aware of the great risk they were running by remaining so near.

The retreat was effected with the utmost amount of caution, and without raising the least suspicion in the breasts of the ambushed officers.

As the reader may suppose, it was with feelings of the greatest satisfaction that Maud listened to the communication made by Isaac.

Her interest in the fate of the little girl was great, and she was truly rejoiced to learn that she was at last in safety, and in so fair a way of recovering her rights.

But the circumstances of her position prevented her from dwelling so much upon the subject as she would otherwise have done.

So soon as ever they had got to a safe distance from the wall, Maud asked, eagerly:

"What is to be done now, Jack—oh, what is to be done?"

"Well, miss," was the answer, "it seems to me that the best thing will be for us to have a few words together about that."

"Give me your opinion—you are calmer than I am."

"Come on, then, miss—we will get as far away from that varmint as ever we can."

"But we can talk now as we move forward?"

"Oh, yes, of course we can!"

"Well, then, what do you advise? Let me hear, for I am all impatience and anxiety."

"Well, miss," said Jack, with great emphasis, "if so be the captain or any on 'em walks up to the secret entrance without knowing what's o'clock, why, nabbed they would be to a certainty; and if they went down below they would be caught like rats in a trap."

"Very true," said Maud, shuddering at the bare idea of such a catastrophe. "The thing for us to decide is, how we can prevent it."

"Right you are, miss."

"How is it to be done?"

"In my opinion there is just one way, and only one."

"And that is—"

"For you and me, miss, to leave this here place at once and meet the captain and the rest on their way back. We should then be able to warn them of their danger."

"Yes—yes, so we should. That is the course we must pursue, Jack."

"You are decided, miss?"

"Yes, quite."

"I only wish, then, we had a couple of horses, for in that case it would make our task infinitely easier; however, as we are without them, the less said the better."



[MAUD'S ARRIVAL AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN.]

"Yes, yes, we can do quite well on foot. Come, come, Jack, we will not lose another moment. I shall know no rest until I have seen and warned them."

"Nor shall I."

During this conversation they had been moving forward somewhat rapidly, and by this time had got quite clear of the castle ruins.

Jack knew well enough what was the destination of the highwaymen; but another difficulty presented itself rather vividly to his mind.

It was more than he or anyone else could tell which way they might take on their return.

Therefore, although they thus set out, the chances were a hundred to one that they would be missed.

This consideration, however, had evidently not yet presented itself to Maud, and Jack had not the heart to suggest it to her.

She was now in the best of spirits, doubting nothing
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that she should be able to convey her warning in good time.

It is not to be wondered at that the excitement she had so recently undergone should render her less capable than usual of calm thought.

No surprise must be manifested, then, that she should, without asking a single question, walk confidently by the side of her companion, for she firmly believed that he was capable of conducting her to her destination.

A furious blast of wind coming from the north-east caused her to shiver and draw her little cloak or cape she wore closely around her shoulders.

Jack noticed the movement, and looking up, observed:

"I am afraid, miss, it is going to turn out a roughish night."

Maud looked up, and for the first time noticed that the sky was covered up with dense, black clouds, which

went scudding onward at a violent rate as they were driven by the fury of the gale.

So preoccupied was she that not until now had she observed the aspect of the weather.

"I—I fear there will be a storm," she said.

"Yes, miss," was the reply, "it looks uncommon like it."

"Then we will push on with all the speed we are capable of making, so as to get as far as possible before it breaks forth."

As she spoke she quickened her steps to such an extent that Jack found some little difficulty in keeping pace with her.

But soon the indications of the approaching conflict of the elements became more and more unequivocal.

Large, heavy spots of rain began to fall, the precursors of the drenching descent of water that was to follow.

Still Maud hurried on with more rapid though uncertain steps.

She was filled with the foreboding dread that this storm would be the means of preventing her from giving the necessary warning.

The plashing of the rain-drops increased, and then from the distance came a low, muttering sound.

"Thunder," observed Jack, as soon as ever he heard it.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than there came a sudden flash of lightning.

When it was over a double darkness seemed to prevail around them.

Maud stopped affrightedly.

In common with many persons, the crashing of thunder and the vivid coruscations of the forked lightning filled her with the utmost alarm.

"Can we not seek a shelter somewhere?" she asked.

"This storm is terrible!"

"And the rain is not comfortable, by any means; and if we are not quick we shall be drenched to the skin!" answered Jack.

"But is there no shelter?" Maud asked, for the flashes of lightning terrified her to such a degree that she dared not lift up her head to look.

"There is a big tree yonder, miss," said Jack. "I should think that will serve our purpose."

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Come, then—do not be afraid; I will lead the way."

Maud grasped Jack's arm very tightly, and ran by the side of him to the tree of which he had spoken.

It was a magnificent oak—many centuries old, no doubt—with huge branches stretching far across the roadway.

Its leaves were large, and grew so closely together that they formed an almost impervious screen from the rain, which, however, raised a prodigious pattering upon them.

"That is better, miss, is it not?" said Jack, speaking in an encouraging a tone as he was able.

The shadow of the huge tree was indeed most welcome to Maud, who, cowering down, clasped her hands over her eyes so as to shut out the vivid flashes of lightning.

In a few moments the storm was at its height.

The forked lightning flashed almost without intermission, while the claps of thunder followed each other so rapidly that the effect produced resembled a continuous peal.

Maud's alarm increased tenfold.

The rain descended in a deluge, and in order to escape it they both had to press as closely as they could to the trunk of the tree.

Maud closed her eyes, for intense fear made her unable to keep them open any longer.

Suddenly she experienced a strange sensation

It was altogether indescribable, and quite different to anything which she had previously experienced.

For a few seconds she seemed deprived of all motion, though she partially retained possession of her senses.

There was upon her mind an impression of an intense scorching sensation—a faint cry, and now her sense of smell was invaded with an odour of a sickening character, and which she could liken to nothing.

An oppressive stillness reigned around her, for the thunder no longer reverberated in such incessant peals.

Tremblingly she opened her eyes, and was conscious by the intense darkness.

She called aloud upon her companions, who she was unable to perceive.

In vain.

There was no response to her words.

Then a terrible, indefinable feeling of dread took entire possession of her.

She apprehended something awful, but what she knew not.

She called again.

The same result.

Then, with a frenzied step, she advanced a pace or two.

It was at this moment that the lightning again blazed forth.

The brilliant though evanescent illumination disclosed to her eyes a sight of horror.

Lying stretched at her feet—she must have stumbled over him had she attempted to advance another step—lay the body of Jack the ostler.

He was dead—dead beyond all doubt.

One glance was sufficient to assure anyone of this, for his countenance was so scorched and disfigured as to present an awful spectacle; and had not Maud been aware of who had been standing by her side she could never have recognised him, for his features were so distorted and rendered so hideous that their appearance was totally changed.

Maud shrieked in horror at the awful sight thus for a second revealed to her affrighted gaze.

How thankful she was when darkness again surrounded every object!

Cautiously, though trembling in every limb, she turned away.

She felt that no earthly consideration whatever would induce her to bestow another glance upon anything so fearful.

She quitted the dangerous, treacherous shelter of the tree, and with a sensation of relief felt the heavy rain-drops beat upon her head and face.

There could be no doubt about the cause of Jack Ostler's sudden death.

The lightning, attracted by the tree, had struck it, and the treacherous fluid, passing through his body, instantaneously deprived him of his life.

Maud must have escaped by something little short of a miracle, for she was standing close beside him.

She must have been affected in some slight degree, as was evidenced by her partial loss of consciousness.

No words of ours can adequately describe the nature of her feelings at this juncture.

A sudden death even of a stranger cannot fail to make a deep effect upon the most callous heart.

How much, then, must the effect be increased when the person is one who stands in the light of a protector!

Maud was distracted, and as she stood alone in the drenching wet, wrung her hands in anguish and despair.

Deprived of the ostler's faithful guidance and advice, where was she to turn—what step should she take next?

She stood distracted.

All the difficulties of her position rushed upon her with overwhelming force, and she felt crushed by them.

No one could possibly be more ignorant of her whereabouts than she was, and she had not the remotest idea of the direction in which her destination lay.

Under these circumstances the task of meeting with Dick and his comrades seemed a hopeless one.

While she was thus wandering at random they might pass her a thousand times.

This knowledge increased if possible the poignancy of her grief.

She wept and sobbed aloud, and to her distempered fancy the very wind seemed to laugh among the branches of the trees and mock her grief.

For a brief space she indulged in the only hope that was left to her.

This was, that Jack the ostler might not have perished.

Oh, how she clung to this vain, improbable idea.

She felt it was improbable, for it was as much the dread of having this last hope destroyed as it was unwillingness again to encounter the hideous spectacle that made her hold back.

At length she raised her voice, but there came no reply.

At last, with a fresh burst of grief, she exclaimed:

"Alas—alas! there can be no doubt that he has perished—and I am indeed forlorn! What to do now for my own safety and for theirs I know not!"

It was a long while before she could arouse herself and calm in a slight degree her agitated feelings.

But the necessity there was for immediate action pressed itself most strongly upon her.

With a resolute effort she dashed the tear-drops from her eyes and gazed about her.

She was standing either in a lane or cross-country road, and that was the sum total of the knowledge she was enabled to gather.

Hesitatingly she advanced with the air of one ignorant of where their steps may lead.

But the remembrance of her husband's danger and the reflection that her husband's life rested in her hands were burnt into her brain and served to animate her.

Her hesitating steps became decisive ones, her walk quickened into a run, nor did she pause until compelled to do so by sheer breathlessness.

During this time she had done nothing but follow the winding of the road, which bent about in a most disheartening fashion.

Again Maud looked about her, but was unable to form any better opinion of her locality.

The thunder and lightning had altogether ceased, but the rain continued to fall with unabated steadiness, and by the inky aspect of the sky above there seemed every probability that it would continue to do so for a considerable length of time.

Her impatience would not suffer her to pause and recover possession of her breath and strength, but she struggled on, though her pace was exceedingly slow, yet she was comforted by the knowledge that she was advancing.

At the same time, however, the utter hopelessness of her undertaking pressed more and more heavily upon her.

She was conscious—fully conscious that success was all but an impossibility.

Could she but have seen before her the prospect of a distant success it would have urged her onward with unflagging spirit.

As it was, her bodily strength decreased as her spirits sank lower and lower.

More than once, overcome by fatigue, she felt as though she must sink down upon the damp earth in the road, but with a sudden effort she would start and struggle on her lonely way.

No sounds of human life—no prospect of a human habitation, however humble, gratified her view.

All around was a darkness and gloom that well typified the condition of her own mind.

Never before in the whole course of her life had she experienced so much utter wretchedness.

She was drenched to the skin now with the rain, and her soaked garments clinging tightly to her materially increased the difficulty of motion.

At last, after a weary interval, she saw before her a dark-looking mass of something, but what she knew not.

A closer approach showed it to be a dwelling of some kind.

She was now so entirely overcome, that it was only by the greatest effort that she could place one foot before the other.

When nearly opposite the building she was compelled to pause, for all strength seemed to forsake her.

Had she not clung tightly to the massive ~~wooden post~~ which supported the swinging sign she must have fallen.

As it was, it seemed as though the earth and all things else were slipping away from beneath her feet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAUD MEETS WITH A STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE AT THE JOLLY SAILOR INN.

SEVERAL moments elapsed before Maud became conscious of the nature of the support to which she clung, but

having ascertained it, she knew at once that by great good fortune she had halted before an inn.

Either her eyes had become more accustomed to the darkness, or else the obscurity was not so great as it had been, for she was now able to make out that the structure was a very old-fashioned, picturesque one.

From the manner in which it was built, it was clear that at least a couple of centuries had elapsed since its erection.

The exterior, however, was plunged in utter darkness.

Not even from one of the upper windows did a gleam of light appear, so that Maud very justly concluded that the whole of the inmates had retired to rest.

Just as she made this reflection, such an accession of the fainting feeling came over her that she feared this time consciousness would entirely abandon her.

As before, a vigorous effort of the will saved her.

She then determined that at all hazards she would knock at the door of this inn, and endeavour to arouse its inhabitants.

She would implore them to allow her brief rest and shelter, for she was now so fatigued that it was impossible for her to proceed any further.

Another reflection only served to confirm her in this resolution.

This was that it might be that at this inn she should be fortunate enough to find a horse which she could hire or purchase.

Luckily, she carried with her a considerable sum of money, so that all was well upon this score.

The prospect of obtaining a horse seemed in a wonderful degree to reanimate her drooping spirits.

She fancied that with a good steed beneath her all those difficulties which now appeared so gigantic would shrink into comparative insignificance.

She would be able to take so much wider a range with so little fatigue to herself, that the chances of her success were at least doubled.

It was these considerations that lent her the requisite strength to quit her sustaining grasp upon the sign-post and totter to the front door of the inn.

She knocked loudly and boldly at it, the sound echoing strangely in the intense silence which prevailed.

For a long time she knocked in vain.

At length, however, a crashing sound was heard above.

This was followed by a volley of oaths.

Looking up to ascertain the cause of this, Maud found that a gust of wind had torn the latticed casement from the grasp of the man who opened it, and dashed it with such violence against the wall that several panes were totally demolished.

"Hilloa!" cried a rough voice—"hilloa! I say, who is there—what is the matter?"

"I want shelter from the storm," answered Maud, in a faltering voice, for her heart sunk within her at such a reception as this. "Fear not that I am unable to pay for the accommodation," she added—"rest assured that I will reward you well."

These words were not without their due effect.

In a considerably mollified voice the man above said:

"Wait where you are a moment, miss, and you shall be attended to. We are all a-bed."

"I will wait," said Maud—"wait patiently."

A brief space of time elapsed, and then her ears caught the welcome sound caused by the removal of bars and bolts.

The next moment the door was opened.

Such a blaze of light seemed to stream across the threshold that for a moment or two Maud's vision was quite confused.

But this was only the effect of the darkness.

When it wore away, she perceived that the illumination proceeded only from a candle, behind which stood a man of sinister aspect.

He was regarding Maud suspiciously.

Her drenched and bedraggled appearance by no means prepossessed him in her favour.

Maud by one glance into his face could read his thoughts with as much ease and readiness as she could have read a book.

"I don't know whether I can accommodate you," he said, at last, in gruff, surly tones.

"You judge from my appearance," said Maud, "that I shall be unable to pay you."

The man started upon finding his thoughts so rightly interpreted.

"You need have no fear on that head," Maud continued. "Look—there is more than sufficient to discharge the most extortionate reckoning."

So saying, she produced from her pocket a gold-sized purse, which she opened just wide enough to allow the man to see that it was filled with guineas.

The sight of this wealth wrought an immediate change.

All his gruffness and sullenness vanished.

He was ready to prostrate himself before Maud, and in the most cringing tones invited her to enter.

Maud was so disgusted with his behaviour that she felt almost inclined to retreat, but the uncertainty of whether she should be able to find another place of rest overcame every other consideration, and she entered.

The man, with great obsequiousness, ushered her into a room, in which he requested her to seat herself.

At the same time he placed the candle upon the table.

"I cannot eat," said Maud, in reply to his question as to what he should place before her. "I feel that if I attempted to swallow a mouthful it would choke me. No—no! all that I require is the opportunity to rest my wearied limbs."

"Very good, miss," said the man, with a peculiar light blazing in his eye, which if Maud had noticed would have served to make her feel very uneasy. "Indeed, I will make you as comfortable as I can. But, perhaps, while I am getting your bed-room ready, you would like to take a glass or two of wine?"

Maud did not reply, for just then her thoughts were wandering far away, and although the man's words fell upon her ears, yet their signification did not penetrate to her understanding.

He, however, evidently took her silence for consent, for he left the room immediately, and after the lapse of a few moments returned with a bottle and a wine-glass.

"Here you are, miss," he said, as he put the articles down upon the table.

His entrance roused Maud from her reverie.

"Your room will soon be ready," said the man. "As you are so wet, a glass of wine will do you good."

Maud shuddered, for just then her thoughts reverted to Jack the ostler and the fearful aspect he had presented as he lay stark and stiff beneath the tree.

The man, attributing this to cold, officiously poured out a glass of wine, and pressed her to drink it.

Maud was just about to raise the glass to her lips, when, happening to turn towards the door, she saw the most singular-looking head and face she had ever happened to behold.

It was only for a moment, however, that she caught sight of it.

The man, following the direction of her eyes, no sooner caught sight of the head and face than he seized a heavy boot-jack that happened to lie upon the table and flung it with all his force.

So suddenly was this act performed, and so accurate was the aim taken, that before the head could be withdrawn it received a terrible blow that echoed and re-echoed through the house.

A loud yell of pain followed, succeeded by a lumbering sound.

Then all was still.

Maud put down her glass of wine untasted on the table, and gazed on the man with mingled wonder and disgust.

Perceiving the nature of the regard that was bent upon him, he said, in an apologetic tone of voice, and with considerable confusion in his manner:

"You see, miss, I am apt at times to be a little short-tempered. But it's over in a moment, and then, Lord bless you, I think nothing of it. Now, that was a rascally young nephew of mine, who has been shamefully misbehaving himself, and I ordered him to keep his room, do you see, miss, but he must needs disobey, and come peeping and prying, so you see he has got what he deserved."

Maud could by no means see this very clearly, but was silent, for she felt however much she might disapprove,

yet she could not presume to find fault with the domestic arrangements of the house.

"You have not drunk your wine, miss."

"No—no; believe me, I cannot. Is my room ready?"

"I dare say it is, by this time."

"I do not want to remain here any longer than will be necessary for me to recover my strength; but in order to continue my journey I want a horse. Can you provide me with one? I will either buy or hire it."

"I can accommodate you, no doubt," answered the man, with a grin that much increased the natural hideousness of his countenance; "but as you are very weary, suppose we leave the settling of that until after you have rested yourself."

Maud was only too willing to consent.

Her fatigue momentarily increased, and her eyelids seemed as though pressed down with leaden weights.

Mechanically, like one walking in a dream, she followed the man up a flight of old-fashioned, crumbling, oaken stairs.

He paused at a door situated at the extremity of a long corridor.

Pushing it open, Maud saw that a lamp was burning on a large chest.

As she crossed the threshold, the man said:

"I don't know whether you need anyone to wait upon you, miss. If you do, I will call up my wife, and she will be with you in a few moments."

"No—no," said Maud. "I shall manage best by myself."

"Very good," was the gruff answer. "Good night—or, rather, good morning, for it is nearer the one than the other."

With these words the man departed, closing the door carefully behind him.

Maud shivered from head to foot, and glanced around her with a sensation of trembling dread for which she could not account.

It was probably imagination merely, but to her it seemed as though the atmosphere of this bed-chamber was heavily laden with some thick, oppressive, sickening odour, of a kind she had never experienced before.

The aspect of the room, too, was in itself quite enough to strike a chill into any heart.

It was barely and plainly furnished; the principal articles consisting of a massive bedstead and a huge oaken chest, which did duty for a dressing-table.

There was no fire in the grate, and the damp and cold from without seemed to penetrate through the window.

But Maud's exhaustion was complete.

Despite the oppressive odour, the chillness, the cheerlessness, she removed a portion of her upper apparel, and lying down on the outside of the bed, covered herself with the coverlet.

Almost as soon as she assumed a recumbent attitude her eyes closed, and she fell off into a deep sleep, that for a time rendered her oblivious of everything.

How long this heavy slumber continued she knew not; but presently she began to dream.

She fancied that Dick Turpin was in some place, and only separated from her by a window.

Slight as this obstruction seemed, yet it appeared to be more than Dick could overcome, so he was tapping upon it with his finger nails, and making signs for Maud to open it for him and allow him to escape.

Maud comprehended this fully, and made the most superhuman efforts to rise and do his bidding.

But every limb refused to obey the dictates of her will.

Again and again she struggled to rise, but it seemed as though tons and tons had been piled upon her breast.

Her anguish was increased by the impatience which was expressed upon Dick's features.

Suddenly, however, the spell was dissolved.

She opened her eyes, and found herself lying on the bed.

During that confusedness of feeling which all experience when awaking in a strange place, her ears were still assailed by the faint clattering, tapping noise which she had heard in her dream.

She listened for several moments; but the sound continued without any intermission.

"What can it be?" she murmured, as she gently raised herself to a sitting posture.

Her heart beat quickly with alarm.

She apprehended she knew not what.

On retiring she had left the candle burning.

It was alight now; but it carried a wick of such portentous length, and with such a huge Turk's head surrounding it, that it gave forth only the dimmest and most uncertain illumination conceivable.

Her alarm increased, for either in fancy or reality the tapping increased in loudness.

With the exception of this the silence which prevailed was oppressively profound.

The longer Maud remained thus the more did her courage evaporate.

The dread of all kinds of evil came over her.

At last, by a most vigorous and determined effort, she slipped off the bed, resumed those clothes she had removed, and looked around her with a calmness that was more assumed than real.

It appeared now that the sound was less equivocal in its character.

Maud was certain that it was produced by tapping upon glass.

But the sound was so strange, so constant, that all kinds of superstitious imaginings came crowding unbidden into her mind.

To what kind of visitation was she to be subjected? for she could scarcely believe that the mysterious sound proceeded from any human agency.

Her heart throbbled so painfully that she seemed every moment in danger of suffocation.

Nevertheless, it was almost involuntarily that her eyes turned in the direction of the window.

Having gazed upon it, she could no longer doubt that the tapping was given upon one of its panes.

But by whom?

For what reason?

Vainly she asked herself these questions.

Her curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, yet it was some time before she could summon up sufficient courage to enable her to move slowly towards it.

As she approached, the tapping abruptly ceased.

Drawing closer still, Maud endeavoured to peep through the glass, but at first the intense darkness without completely baffled her.

Another tap, tap, was given.

She saw something move, and recoiled in affright.

Just then she thought of the condition of the candle, and, with a trembling hand, removed the snuff.

A bright, clear light immediately ensued, by the aid of which, as she again glanced towards the window, she saw a human face pressed closely against the panes.

She seemed about to shriek aloud in the extremity of her alarm, but terror seemed to freeze up her voice, and only a hoarse whispering sound escaped her lips.

The countenance was one well calculated to strike terror into any sensitive breast, and its ugliness was probably much increased by the manner in which all the features were flattened against the glass.

Maud had to clutch the edge of the table very tightly to support herself, otherwise she must have fallen.

All the time her eyes remained riveted upon the face at the window as though her eyes had been fascinated by some serpent.

The tapping was resumed, and Maud was no longer in any doubt as to the exact cause which had produced it.

The person outside, whoever he might be—Maud had no doubt about the sex—was clattering with his finger nails upon the glass.

As she continued to gaze, however, she could not help fancying that the face had upon it a friendly expression, and which, if rightly interpreted, meant that, for some reason or other, a communication was desired.

This idea, having once taken possession of her mind, increased so much in force that she by slow degrees again approached the window.

There could be no mistaking the satisfaction visible upon the features of the face outside.

The hand that had been so busily engaged in tapping was now employed in making signs, the evident purport of which was that she should open the casement.

But naturally Maud hesitated to comply with this demand.

It might be a most serious thing—perhaps a fatal step to admit this stranger to her apartment.

Her feelings must have expressed themselves upon her countenance, for the face assumed an aspect of so imploring and entreating a nature as to be almost irresistible.

Hesitatingly Maud stretched forth her hand to remove the fastening.

Then drew it back again without effecting her purpose.

The face looked deeply disappointed—nay, despairing.

Again Maud hesitated.

Her hand touched the fastening.

It was removed, and a gust of cold night air, carrying upon it some thousands of watery particles, dashed into the room.

Its immediate effect was to extinguish the candle.

Finding herself in the dark so suddenly by no means tended to calm Maud's feelings, though the cool wind seemed to disperse those vapours which hitherto had seemed to hang about her brain.

"Don't be afraid, lady," said a suppressed voice, in what was doubtless intended to be a very encouraging tone—"don't be afraid. I have come to save your life! Do not doubt me, but let me enter."

"Come in," said Maud—"come in. If you intend me any harm, may Heaven pardon you for your wickedness in thus deceiving a poor, helpless woman!"

Almost before she had finished giving utterance to these words, she found one of the strangest and most uncouth-looking figures she had ever beheld standing before her.

Her first sentiments were those of undissembled terror.

The being who had entered was scarcely an inch taller than the oak chest close to which he stood, yet his head and face had the appearance, both in size and expression, of a full-grown man.

In this appearance his shoulders joined, for they were uncommonly broad, square, and muscular.

His arms, too, were long and powerful, and so out of proportion to the rest of his body that when he stood upright he could almost touch the ground with the tips of his fingers.

His back seemed to have received some kind of injury in childhood, which had prevented the growth of the lower part of his body, so that, in fact, he presented the appearance of a child's body surmounted from the waist upwards by the body of a man.

Well, then, might Maud feel terrified at beholding this intruder into her chamber, for the darkness, although it permitted her to make out his general appearance, would not allow her to scrutinise him with any closeness.

"Don't be afraid, lady," he said, in a faint, piping voice, which sounded very oddly coming from so capacious a chest, "Hunch will not hurt you, lady. Wait a moment—I will shut the window and get a light."

There was something assuring in these words, and also in the manner in which they were uttered, and Maud felt much of her fear abate.

The window was closed, and when the candle was relighted, Maud was able to look more closely at the form of her nocturnal visitor.

So far from exhibiting any aversion or disgust, her heart filled with pity and commiseration for the unfortunate being.

She was, however, scarcely prepared for the result.

He recognised in a moment, as if by intuition, the state of her feelings towards him, and the tears rose thickly to his eyes.

At the same time he threw himself down upon his knees, and seizing her dress, pressed it repeatedly to his lips.

"My life is yours—my life is yours, lady, for you are the very first that has ever given a kind glance at poor Hunch! Be kind to me; but whether you are or not, I have come here to save your life! Don't be frightened, Hunch can do it! Hunch will save your life—he will indeed, lady—he will indeed!"

CHAPTER MXV.

FRESH DANGER IS FOUND BY MAUD AT THE OLD INN.

MAUD gazed for a moment or two in silence upon this singular specimen of humanity.

Then in a low voice which she vainly tried to make calm, she asked:

"If my life is in danger, how came you to know it?"

Upon hearing these words, Hunch, as he called himself, looked around with wildness and terror in his looks.

Then, very faintly, he whispered:

"Hush, hush, lady, and I will tell you all!"

"All what?"

"All the mysteries and crimes of this fearful place. Have you not felt the effect of its shadow upon you? Does not your breath come short and thick? Does not your heart knock against your ribs?"

Maud was fain to confess feeling these sensations.

"It is because," continued Hunch, in a more hollow whisper—"it is because you scent the blood which is in the air—because you feel that you breathe the atmosphere of murder."

At these dreadful words, which were pronounced with bated breath and flaming eyes, Maud's very lips grew white.

"I frighten you, lady," observed Hunch, perceiving the effect his words had wrought. "But be not afraid. I will save your life."

"If you would tell me how it is in danger," answered Maud, "and if you would make me acquainted with the means by which you intend to save it, I should be more content."

"I know that, lady."

"Satisfy me, then."

"I will, without delay; but do not speak so loud, or you may be overheard; then even I will be powerless to save you—ay, as powerless as you would be to save yourself."

"I will be silent."

"I wonder how it is," began Hunch, musingly, "that ever you came to cross the threshold of the Jolly Sailor?"

"Is that the name of the inn?"

"It is. Did you not see it on the sign, and the figure of the sailor over the door? Ha, ha! the Jolly Sailor and myself are the very best of friends!"

These words, coupled with the wildness and strangeness of his appearance and demeanour, strengthened an opinion which, during the last few minutes, had been growing in Maud's mind, namely, that this uncanny creature was not in proper possession of his senses.

"It was dark," she said, replying to his question, "and I was unable to see anything. I came in here for shelter from the storm."

"Yes, yes, I might have known that. And now, lady, listen to me. You have had the ill-fortune to enter a den of murder, for this place is nothing more."

Maud gasped for breath.

"Whenever a solitary traveller enters this place, who happens to have about him any considerable sum of money, he never departs again. He is ruthlessly slaughtered, and his body thrown down the old well. Ha, ha! what a tale could be told by that old well, to be sure, if anyone would bring its contents to the light of day!"

"You affright me," said Maud; "surely you cannot be in earnest in what you say?"

"You shall judge shortly. Did you not show my uncle your purse when you stood outside the door?"

"I did—I did! Oh, Heaven! Yes, I did!"

"That obtained your admittance," said Hunch, slowly, and nodding at every word as though in order to give the utmost emphasis to what he said, "but it was only in order that you might be murdered and despoiled of it. Oh, I know all!"

"Then—then—the landlord of this awful place is—your uncle?"

"He is, and treats me just like a nephew. Did you notice him throw the boot-jack at me?"

"Was it at you?"

"Rather! Look here."

As he spoke he removed a rough frieze cap which he wore, and showed one side of his head, in which was a deep gash, from which the blood was slowly oozing.

"I wonder it did not kill you."

"Lor' bless you, lady, that's nothing. He has treated me like a dog, and so has everyone else that I have met with except you. But I am planning my revenge, and before the new day comes it is odd to me if I am not fully satisfied for all the injuries he has done me!"

"What do you mean?"

"Hush—hush! I will explain directly. Hark! hark!" A strange sound came from below.

"He is getting ready," said Hunch, in a hoarse whisper. "What, after all, if they should be too late!"

"Explain—explain yourself!"

"No time—no time!" said Hunch, moving to the window and looking out. "Listen—listen! Can you hear anything like the tramp of horses' feet? If so, all will be well."

"No—no!" said Maud, with chattering teeth. "I can hear nothing but the sighing of the wind among the tree tops."

"Then he will discover us!"

"Can we not escape?"

"What, by the window?"

"Yes."

"No, no; that would be impossible."

"How so—how so? By what means did you ascend?"

"Lady, they tell me I am like a cat—can climb anywhere. Look, here is an old, half-rotten pear-tree fastened to the wall—that was the means I used to make my ascent."

"Can it be possible?"

"You cannot get that way; but I have another expedient ready. Quick—quick! Off with your dress and cloak."

Maud hesitated to comply with this demand, and yet she could see by the hasty movements of Hunch that there was the utmost necessity for speed.

As for the latter, he with great rapidity removed every object which stood upon the oaken chest we have before had occasion to mention.

There was so much mystery in all these occurrences that Maud could do nothing more than stand still like a statue and watch all that her companion did.

The lid of the chest was very heavy, and she saw him struggling to raise it.

Although quite ignorant of his intentions, she, unbidden, stepped forward to assist him.

But when, by their united efforts, the lid was fairly raised and Maud took a glance at the interior of the chest, she almost swooned with horror and disgust.

For a few seconds everything spun round her with lightning speed.

She could tell Hunch was saying something to her in earnest tones, but his voice sounded only like the faint and distant murmur of the sea.

The first words she distinguished were:

"I ought to have told you of this; but here is a proof—an awful proof of the truth of what I have told you. That which lies within the chest is the body of a traveller who halted here last night after sunset. You see how he has been treated. He was lying on your bed; and how do you think this room was prepared for your reception? Why, simply by lifting the murdered traveller out of the bed and placing the body in this box, as there was no time to carry him to the well in the cellar!"

The reader may perhaps be able to form some slight idea of the effect which these horrifying details produced upon Maud.

She stood like one changed into stone.

But her companion's next words aroused her.

"Look here, miss, this is what I intend to do, and, rely upon it, the scheme will answer. I am going to lift this fellow out of here on to the bed again, wrap him in part of your clothes, and leave him there. My uncle will know nothing of the substitution, for he is always obliged to prime himself well with brandy before he can undertake a job like this!"

Maud's blood ran cold.

"And—and we," she gasped—"where—where shall we be?"

"We will hide."

"Where?"

"Beneath the bed."

The sound of a footstep ascending the staircase could now be heard.

"Quick—quick," said Hunch, "out with the candle! There must be no light save the one he will bring with him. Then lend me your cloak. I will make shift for that to do. Never mind your dress."

While issuing these hasty injunctions Hunch was by no means idle.

With an exertion of strength for which, certainly, no one would have given him credit for possessing, but which was due to the singular conformation of the upper part of his body, he raised the dead body of the traveller from the box and staggered with it to the bed, which, luckily, was only about two paces distant.

He had to be particularly careful in placing the body upon the bedstead, but he accomplished the feat successfully.

Quickly, then, he wrapped Maud's cloak about the inanimate form, and covered it over with the bed-clothes.

Without any pause he then closed the chest, replaced the articles upon it, and taking Maud by the arm, bade her creep beneath the bed.

This was no time for demur, and Maud obeyed with the utmost promptitude, for happening to look towards the door she saw a bright light shining beneath it and heard some one speak in a low whisper.

All attempts to describe her feelings now must be futile.

We leave it for the reader to imagine her sensations while she waited for the conclusion of this the most awful adventure she had ever encountered, or ever heard of.

It was some satisfaction to her when she felt her strange companion take hold of her hand, for it assured her that she had a protector near.

All considerations were, however, quickly swallowed up by the absorbing interest caused by the events that ensued.

The whispering sound lasted only for a few seconds, and was succeeded by a profound silence.

Probably those outside were listening.

Maud fancied she had secured the door, but if so, the intruders must have possessed some ready and mysterious means of removing the fastenings, for the door was slowly and gently opened just wide enough for one person to enter.

Then came another pause.

At last, with a slow and shrinking step, a man entered the room.

Maud could see him plainly, for the person by whom he was accompanied stood upon the threshold holding a light, the rays from which fell clear and bright into the room.

The man crept towards the side of the bed, then pausing, faintly whispered.

"Why the devil don't you come nearer with the light! Are you afraid, or do you wish me to blunder up against something in the dark and spoil the game?"

"I was afraid the light would wake her."

"Never fear! You mean you are afraid to come in."

"Nothing of the kind."

With these words, the second speaker came into view of the two watchers.

It was a woman, though both in her mind and person all traces of femininity had long since been trampled out.

The former was embrutalised, and the latter hideous in the highest degree.

Although she had declared herself free from fear, yet the candle trembled in her grasp, while she shook like an aspen from head to foot, thus giving the lie to her assertion.

She did not advance very far into the room, but stood near the door, and held the candle in such a way that its light was well diffused, though the draught which seemed to ascend the staircase caused the flame to flicker in such a manner that the illumination was most uncertain.

Nevertheless, it was sufficient to enable the murderer to make out that something resembling the form of their last guest was lying on the bed.

He did not dare trust himself to look at it too closely, lest the spurious courage which enabled him to execute such deeds should abate.

"Get your knife," whispered the woman—"take my advice and get your knife! It will be much the best."

"Not I," answered the man, in the same hushed tones—"there is no need for it. The pillow will do as well."

"Bah!" ejaculated his companion, contemptuously.

"You know I hate to have anything like this to do

with a woman. I don't think it worth while even now."

"Bah!" said the woman again, but with much greater contempt than before. "Either do it or stand back and let me!"

The man did not say a word more, but took a step towards the bed.

He did not approach any nearer the head of it than he was positively compelled, cast stretching out his arm as far as ever he possibly could, he took hold of the pillow.

His movements now were all very rapid.

Neither Maud nor Hunch could see exactly what he was about, yet they could tell that he took hold of the pillow, and, placing it over the face of the supposed sleeping person, held it in that position for several minutes.

During this time, Maud and her companion only drew their breaths by stealth, so fearful were they that the slight sound would be overheard by the two watchers in the painfully-intense silence that now prevailed.

At length the woman whispered:

"That will do—that is quite long enough! She has drawn her last breath now."

Silently the man removed the pillow, and stood listening.

Maud and Hunch now held their breaths altogether. "It's all right," cried the woman. "Come away now. She is dead enough!"

Just as she spoke these words, the sound of a tremendous knocking from below reached their ears.

The two guilty wretches were so alarmed at it that they both ran against each other.

The candle was knocked from the woman's feeble grasp, and, falling to the floor, was instantly extinguished.

The man, upon gaining possession of his voice, poured out a volley of curses.

"What—what can it be?" gasped the woman.

"Why, some one at the door."

"But who—who?"

"Why, some chance travellers, of course. What else?"

"I—I felt terrified, and so did you, though now you will try to brave it out!"

"Nothing of the kind, fool! Stand aside! What the devil did you want to drop the light like that for, curse you!"

With these words the man groped his way out of the room in the best way he could, and stumbled down the stairs.

The woman followed him, all the time crying on him to stay.

But he disregarded all her appeals.

No sooner had they both quitted the apartment than Hunch quitted his place of concealment.

Maud hastily followed his example, though such was the state of horror she was in that she was scarcely conscious of what she was about.

Hunch rubbed his hands together briskly, and in various eccentric ways testified to feeling a great amount of satisfaction.

"Do you hear that knocking?" he asked, gleefully. "It seems to have increased tenfold."

"It does—it does!"

"Hark! is it not music!"

"Do you know the cause of it?"

"I do—I do?" replied the singular creature, more triumphantly than before.

"Explain it—explain it! Do not keep me for a moment in suspense! Let me know at once just what it means!"

"Be under no apprehension—all is well. You are safe now, lady—quite safe; and, as for my uncle, why, his little game is done with for ever."

"Still I do not understand. Speak plainer."

"Well, then, I will make all so clear that you cannot fail to understand it."

"Quick, then—be quick!"

"Well, lady, if you only knew how ill-treated I have been by my uncle you would not wonder that I should burn to avenge my wrongs!"

"Well?"

"For a long time I have been unable to find any means

of doing so, but at last I hit upon the plan. They kept me closely confined here, not allowing me to leave the premises, but I found out how to baffle them—ha, ha! I made a pen with a piece of sharp-pointed wood, and with the blood that I purposely made to flow from one of my fingers I wrote a letter to the magistrate at Bow Street, describing the situation of this house and the awful deeds enacted in it, requesting him to send down a troop of officers with all possible secrecy and despatch. They have arrived now. 'Jark! how they hammer at the door! Nunky must know who they are, and is frightened to admit them! Ha, ha! Oh, it's good—it's good!'

To say that Maud listened to this explanation with speechless horror would be only to convey a very feeble idea of the state of her mind.

So appalled was she that her lungs refused to perform their usual functions—respiration was completely stopped.

Her eyes started from their sockets.

Her teeth chattered, and she stood slightly bending forward in an attitude of intense fear.

Hunch observed the effect of his disclosure with an astonishment that was ludicrous.

"Have you heard aright, lady?" he inquired at length—"have you understood me?"

She nodded.

Speech was denied her.

"What, then, causes this terror? There must be a mistake somehow."

By making a great effort, Maud managed to murmur:

"No, no—no mistake!"

"Why, then, this terror?"

"Because the presence of officers is to the full as perilous to me as it can be to your uncle."

"But—you—you do not—mur—" gasped Hunch.

"No, no—not that! But I have been arrested and tried for a crime of which I was and am perfectly innocent; nevertheless, I was pronounced guilty."

"And you escaped?"

"Yes, by the aid of friends I escaped, and since then have, with the utmost difficulty, eluded the officers. Now they are here, and I cannot escape. At the first glance they will recognise me. I shall be powerless to resist them! Then—then—oh, then all—all will be lost!"

As she uttered these last words, in tones of indescribable agony, Maud threw her arms up above her head, and, with a cry of intense anguish, sank sobbing and fainting upon a seat.

Hunch gazed at her for a second or two in silence; then, by that time being able to comprehend pretty well what mischief he had caused, he went deliberately to the wall, and dashed his head a great many times against it.

This action diverted Maud's attention, and caused her to look up.

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated, "what are you about?"

"Only serving myself out, lady, that's all," replied Hunch, pausing in his self-inflicted punishment.

"Do not be so foolish as that! What you did was for the best."

"But that does not make matters any better for you, lady."

"No, but—"

What Maud would have said then is uncertain, for she was interrupted by a terrific crash, which came from the bottom of the house, and which completely drowned all other sounds.

"What—what is that?" she gasped, as soon as the noise ceased.

Hunch ran immediately to the door, and opened it to the extent of two or three inches.

The crash was caused by the yielding of the front door, which had given way before the furious blows rained upon it by the police officers.

There was then a hasty rush of feet, and a voice cried:

"Lights—lights! Lights, I say—at once!"

Then, almost immediately, the same voice exclaimed:

"Seize them—seize them both, and bind them securely! Beyond a doubt they are the miscreants of whom we are in search!"

A slight scuffle ensued, but the officers were so overpowering in their numbers that after a brief struggle the man and the woman were securely made prisoners.

This scene was imperfectly beheld by Hunch, who projected his head a little way through the partially open doorway and peeped down the staircase.

In his interest there is no knowing how long he might have stood a spectator, oblivious of aught else.

Suddenly he felt a slight touch upon his arm.

Turning round, he caught sight of the pallid face of Maud close to his own.

"The officers have entered?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Hunch, whose astonishment was unbounded at the calm manner in which Maud now spoke.

"Then—then, you must assist me to escape!"

"How—how?"

"Cannot you suggest the means?"

"I fear, lady, it is impossible! Oh, I wish I had died a thousand times before I had lived to bring you into so much peril!"

Some loudly-uttered words now struck upon the ears of both and arrested their attention.

"That is right," said a voice below. "Now search the place thoroughly from top to bottom, and particularly an old well situated in one of the cellars. We shall then soon know whether we have been deceived by false information, or whether what we have heard is quite correct."

An immediate movement followed these words, and the voice continued:

"Two or three of you keep a sharp look-out on the outside of the building, so that no one shall leave the premises unperceived. Then as for the rest, let them follow me upstairs, where I fancy the most important discoveries are to be made."

No sooner were these injunctions uttered than the sound of heavy footsteps informed the listeners that they were in the act of ascending the staircase.

"Fasten the door," said Maud, calmly, though she spoke only with the calmness of despair—"fasten the door; and that, if it does no more, will impede their progress, and give us a little time to think what can be done."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OFFICERS ADOPT SOME ENERGETIC MOVEMENTS AT THE INN.

HUNCH rapidly complied with Maud's command, though when she gave it she really knew not what would be the good actually effected.

At any rate, it would prevent the officers from entering so speedily as they would otherwise have done.

"What next, lady?" said Hunch, turning round to her.

"Escape!" she cried. "I must escape!"

"You heard what the officers said?"

"I did."

"Then how is it to be managed?"

Maud only shook her head.

Hunch was anxious and bewildered.

"I trust—I must escape," Maud murmured, "no matter what risk I incur in doing so! Not only my own life and liberty, but also the lives of those near and dear to me depend upon my getting away! At all hazards it must be done!"

"I fear it is impossible."

Maud just at this moment darted to the window.

In the tumult of her mind she had forgotten all about it.

Now it presented itself to her as an outlet for escape. Dashing open the casement she looked out, but the intense darkness appalled her.

"I don't know how you can get that way, lady."

"Did not you ascend?" said Maud, overcoming as well as she could her sensations of terror, and endeavouring to distinguish the nature of the various objects outside.

"I climbed up," said Hunch; "but it was by clinging to the branches of the old cherry-tree. You could never make such a descent."

It was just at this moment that the officers, having made a hasty search of the other rooms, came to the one in which Maud and Hunch were.

They tried the door and found it fast.

The sound of her feet being so near to her ended



[BISHOP, THE OFFICER, TRIES A SHOT AT BLACK BESS.]

Maud with a degree of courage which she never dreamt she had possession of.

Comprehending the means by which Hunch had made his way into the chamber, she did not hesitate to attempt to leave it by the same means.

Hunch in vain attempted to prevent her.

Almost before he was aware of it, she had lowered herself through the casement.

Perilous as the attempt was, yet she preferred making it to remaining in the room and facing her foes.

With the strength which nothing but despair can give, she clung to the branches of the tree.

Most fortunate indeed for her was it that she was surrounded by so intense a darkness, for it prevented her from beholding her perilous position.

Could she but have had one glance at the ground below, all nerve, strength, and self-possession would have deserted her.

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Clinging close to the wall, however, she directed all her energies to keeping a secure hold upon the tree.

Hunch, finding that she descended with safety, did not hesitate to lower himself through the window.

To him the feat was the most ordinary feat in the world.

The immense strength which he possessed in the upper part of his body easily enabled him to hold on with one hand while with the other he closed the window, though, of course, he was unable to fasten it from the outside.

He had scarcely done this before the door of the room yielded to the violent kick given to it by one of the police officers. Several rushed across the threshold.

Hunch waited to behold no more, but lowered himself with a speed that looked reckless in the extreme. But he reached the ground with absolute safety.

He found Maud cowering down close to the wall.

Now that she had escaped so far her nerves became unstrung, and she had no longer the power to do anything to assist herself.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

Her sudden prostration filled Hunch with surprise.

Without exactly comprehending it, he said:

"Come—come, lady, you must not give way thus. Courage—courage! The worst is over, though we are by no means out of danger."

Maud roused herself a little, as she asked:

"What is to be done now? Tell me—oh, tell me what will be our next step?"

"Why, to get away."

"But the officers are watching."

"True, and on that account it will be no easy matter. Yet it must be accomplished."

"And you remember," said Maud, with a fresh burst of grief—"you remember what I told you about my friends?"

"I do, my lady."

"Time, precious time, is flying fast, and here am I doing nothing on their behalf. If I do not see them and warn them of their danger, they will go headlong to death!"

"Keep your heart up, lady. We have succeeded wonderfully at present. In the end, no doubt, all will be well."

These words had quite an encouraging and reassuring effect upon Maud, who rose silently to her feet.

Hunch glanced up to the window of the room they had just left, through which came a bright light and also the sound of many voices speaking in loud tones.

"They have made a discovery," he whispered to Maud, "which will doubtless occupy them for some time. This is the opportunity we ought to seize to escape."

"Are there any horses on the premises?" Maud asked. "If so, let us endeavour to gain possession of them. We shall not only stand a better chance of getting away from these officers, but I shall be enabled to meet with my friends."

"Yes—we have two horses in the stable close at hand; but—"

"But what?"

"I question very much whether there is the least hope of our being able to get possession of them unseen by the officers."

"Nevertheless, let us try," replied Maud, with that decision which seemed to come natural to her in moments of the greatest difficulty.

"Come, then," said Hunch, in a faint whisper—"follow me. I will lead the way."

Although the storm was over, yet the sky had by no means cleared, and the density of the clouds caused an intense darkness to prevail.

Yet, by straining her eyes, Maud was able to keep the form of her strange companion in view.

She followed him across a kind of yard, littered over with rubbish of every description.

At length, without having apparently attracted the attention of anyone, or raised the least alarm, they paused before a roughly-made door communicating with a wooden shed.

This door yielded to the slight touch which Hunch gave it.

He beckoned to Maud to cross the threshold.

Then closed the door again.

"We may congratulate ourselves so far, lady," he murmured, in the same cautious tones. "If I can only manage to get the horses bridled, I do believe we shall get off safely."

Maud's heart beat high with hope.

Hunch groped about in the dark.

He must have been wonderfully well acquainted with the place, for he found what he wanted with very little trouble.

As soon as the two animals were caparisoned he cautiously led them out.

The utmost rapidity now characterised every one of his movements.

He assisted Maud to mount, and vaulted into the saddle himself.

Scarcely had he gained his seat than a loud cry of alarm was uttered by some one close at hand.

The discharge of a pistol followed, though it would seem that the weapon had been fired merely as the means of attracting attention.

"Follow me," cried Hunch, in his odd, shrill tones—"follow me closely, and all will be well."

Maud followed this injunction without hesitation.

Dimly—very dimly before her she could perceive the form of the hunchback.

In order to leave the premises at the rear of the inn it was necessary to emerge into the road.

This was the moment of greatest danger.

Hunch felt it, and knew that if they could once get a clear start there was a strong probability of ultimate escape.

The explosion of the pistol had put every one of the officers on the alert.

The alarm was general.

"Hold—hold!" cried a loud voice, as the fugitives went dashing by. "Hold, or the consequences of refusal be on your own heads! Pull up, or we fire!"

Hunch took not the least notice of this command, neither did Maud.

The officers, enraged at this contumacy, at once discharged a volley.

The report was deafening, and for an infinitesimally brief space of time everything around was revealed by the flash.

A faint cry came to Maud's lips.

As she uttered it she fancied one of a similar character came from her companion.

Of this she could not be sure; but observing that he put his horse to additional speed she, without hesitation followed his example.

The officers were not mounted, and, consequently, the slight delay which was inevitably caused by their mounting to their saddles enabled the two fugitives to get a tolerably good start.

Maud called out several times to her companion to know whether he was hurt.

But on no occasion did she receive a reply.

She urged her own horse onward, and endeavoured to get breast to breast with Hunch, but was unable to do so, for the more she tried to overtake him the faster he went.

Her fears were now aroused by hearing the tremendous clatter caused by the hoofs of the officers' horses, which were thundering along at the top of their speed.

At this moment Hunch, with great suddenness and abruptness, turned his horse's head down a narrow lane on the right hand.

So short was the turn he took that she feared at first it would hurl him from the saddle.

The manner in which he swayed about from one side to the other was truly wonderful to behold.

Again and again Maud called out to him.

But so far from taking any notice of her voice, he leaned first to one side then to the other in a manner more alarming than before.

It seemed to her as though he was making frantic—nay, superhuman efforts to retain his balance.

All these efforts quickly proved in vain.

With a sudden lurch his body fell over to one side, and reached the earth with a dull, sickening crash.

Maud closed her eyes, and shrieked aloud in horror.

The horse still continued his frantic career, and Maud's horror was now greatly intensified by perceiving that, in falling, Hunch had not been fortunate enough to clear his foot from the stirrup.

At every bound the now thoroughly terrified animal took, his body was dashed with fearful violence upon the ground.

Whether life was extinct or not Maud could not tell, nor had she any means of ascertaining.

In vain she urged her own horse to the utmost of its capacity, in order that she might make an attempt to put a stop to the frantic creature's career.

As before, however, Hunch's horse maintained the lead, and at last Maud was obliged to resign herself to the conviction that it was out of her power to overtake him, or do anything to help or save him.

In the intense interest she felt in this pursuit she forgot for a brief period all about the police officers who were pursuing her so eagerly.

Beyond question the endeavour to overtake her companion caused her to make greater speed than she would otherwise have done.

The intense excitement deadened her to the danger that naturally attached itself to such a headlong course.

The animal in front of her was now quite mad with terror, and consequently it is easy to conceive at what a furious rate it went, since all its efforts seemed to be to outrun the mass that was lumbering at its heels.

Nevertheless, although its speed was so terrific, Maud managed to keep up with it, and the terrified animal, in spite of all its efforts, was unable to increase the distance there was between them.

How long this terrible chase continued Maud knew not, but long ere it was brought to a termination she felt an odd sensation of faintness and sickness come over her for which she was not altogether able to account.

Then she became sensible of a dull, aching pain in her right side.

Mechanically she pressed her hand upon it, believing the pain to be produced by nothing else than the hasty gallop.

She withdrew her fingers with an ejaculation of terror. Her dress on that side was wet and sticky, and in a moment she became aware that when the officers had fired their volley she had not escaped injury.

She could not believe, however, that the injury was a very severe one, because had it been it would unquestionably have manifested itself sooner and in a different manner.

When the first shock of this discovery was over, Maud again turned her attention to her unfortunate protector.

Just as she glanced down the road the horse contrived in some way to get rid of his burden.

Either from the stirrup-leather giving way, or from his foot becoming released from the stirrup, Hunch's frightful course was brought to a termination.

So suddenly did this event occur that Maud had much ado to pull her horse up in time to prevent herself from riding over him.

As soon as ever her own steed, which showed every symptom of great terror, was brought to a standstill, she dismounted and bent over the prostrate form of her unfortunate protector.

It was now each moment growing lighter, for morning was close at hand.

By the dim, gray illumination, Maud beheld a terrible and fearful spectacle.

Poor Hunch was from head to foot nothing but one disfigured mass of bruises and scratches covered with dust and blood.

The manner in which his torn apparel was soaked by the latter showed that he must have been badly wounded by one or more bullets when the officers discharged their volley.

Maud pronounced his name, but it was in a most hopeless tone of voice.

There came no reply.

Indeed, it was too much to suppose that any human being could survive such frightful injuries as he had received.

Upon making the discovery that he was indeed no more, Maud burst out into a passion of regretful tears.

Misfortune and death did indeed seem to follow in her footsteps, and to be the fate of those who were willing to befriend her.

The fatality was a strange one.

This was the second faithful protector she had lost upon this truly fearful night, and now she found herself once more solitary, alone, and unprotected, and as regards the important expedition upon which she had set out, so far from being nearer, she actually seemed further from the accomplishment of the important errand upon which she had set out.

Despairingly, and with her heart completely weighed down, she rose and looked around.

The dull, distant, but unmistakable sound produced by the horses of the pursuing officers struck upon her ears, and once more aroused her into fresh life and activity.

She remembered most vividly and painfully how unreasonable was her present expedition.

For herself she cared little, if anything.

She felt that her life could not be better spent than in saving Dick, who to her was far dearer than her own existence.

Nothing else but this feeling could have enabled her to struggle against, and finally to some extent overcome, the deathlike sensation of faintness which now came over her.

She reeled, and every object seemed to be gyrating round her at an awful speed.

Nevertheless, with the manner of one deprived of sight, she groped about, in order to obtain a grasp upon her horse's saddle.

The animal stood perfectly quiet, though intense terror caused him to tremble in every limb.

Maud feared, however, that to remount was a task far beyond her failing powers.

She tried again and again.

But in vain.

Each attempt was of a more feeble character than its predecessors.

But now the sound of her pursuers came upon her ears with much greater distinctness than before.

Surely now they must be close—very close at hand.

This knowledge nerved her to one more trial.

Summoning up the whole of her remaining strength, she renewed her endeavours.

This time she succeeded, though before she had time to settle herself properly in the saddle and obtain a firm seat the terrified horse dashed off.

By clinging partly to the mane and partly to the pommel of the saddle, Maud contrived to save herself from falling.

Then, despite her insecurity, she urged her horse onward with her voice, so anxious was she to make all speed.

But there was little need for this.

The creature's terror seemed to increase rather than abate.

Every moment his pace became more terrific.

Closer and closer upon his back Maud crouched as she felt herself in more and more imminent danger of falling off.

Great as this peril was, yet it shrunk into absolute insignificance when compared with that from which she was escaping; and, under the circumstances, there was one thing which could not fail of affording her satisfaction.

She was certainly distancing her foes, for now they could no longer be heard trampling so loudly upon the roadway.

It would almost seem as though Maud was now about altogether to elude her foes.

But such was not the case.

Again, and with tenfold intensity, the sensations caused by the loss of so much blood as had flowed from her side reasserted themselves.

And now indeed was the great danger.

Her position upon the back of the horse was not in the least degree more secure than it had been.

Every object seemed to fade away from her.

The hedgerows retreated until they were lost to sight altogether.

Strange sounds, like the clanging of far-off bells, were ringing in her ears.

Yet, with the grasp of despair, she continued to maintain her hold.

Unconsciously, however, her fingers relaxed.

Gradually all muscular power was departing.

She gasped for breath.

She tried to utter a cry—to call out for assistance in that spot, although she was dimly conscious that she should find none.

More and more to one side her body hung.

The horse, snorting with alarm as he felt the fluttering of her apparel against his flanks, dashed on more furiously than ever.

There was a sudden, rushing sound—

A gurgling cry—

A heavy splash, and the next moment the horse continued his headlong course—

But he was riderless!

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONTINUES TO DESCRIBE MAUD'S MISFORTUNES.

It so happened that at the moment when Maud slipped from the saddle the horse was passing over a rustic wooden bridge which spanned a stream.

In a general way but a small amount of water flowed beneath the rudely-constructed arch, but now the volume of the stream was much increased by the quantity of rain that had so recently fallen.

The effect of this was also that the little water-course flowed with much greater swiftness than was common.

In one sense, it was fortunate that this should be the spot where Maud fell.

In some strange way, she seemed to slip from the saddle, and dropped in comparatively speaking a gentle manner into the brook.

Such was the force of the current that she was instantaneously drifted beneath the arch, narrowly escaping a violent blow from some of the massive wooden supports belonging to the structure.

The sudden immersion into the cold water had the effect of partially restoring her to the proper possession of her faculties.

Still, she was not able to make any effort to support herself upon the surface of the water.

Luckily, her garments becoming distended by wind caused her to float, and to this circumstance alone must the saving of her life be attributed.

She knew nothing about the officers who came galloping up, and who, upon reaching the little narrow wooden bridge, came to a pause, in order that they might ride in single file across it.

These men could still hear the clatter of horse's feet before them; and never dreaming that Maud had quitted the saddle, they continued the chase without delay.

But of all this Maud knew nothing.

The rapid current of the stream carried her along for a great distance, until suddenly she experienced a fall, as though she had passed over the verge of some mimic waterfall.

Then her further progress down the stream was arrested by an obstacle of some kind.

What it was she knew not, but with the instinct of self-preservation she seized hold upon it.

The water no longer rushed past her.

All was comparatively calm and still.

Gradually and slowly morning dawned.

The early light shone grayly and chilly upon the water and the two buildings that were near it.

One was a singular-looking white edifice, built quite close to the water's edge,

The other was a cot—a humble yet pleasant-looking building.

It was just as the sun rose above the horizon that the door of the little cottage was opened.

A man appeared upon the threshold.

The sun fell clear and red upon him, showing that he was past the middle age, and apparently the possessor of immense strength.

In his outward aspect there was, however, little calculated to prepossess an observer in his favour.

Pausing for a moment on the step of the dwelling, he placed his hand before his eyes to screen off the rays of the sun, and as he did so he remarked to some one within:

"Just as I expected, wife—just as I expected. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, that's true enough. There are plenty no doubt to whom last night's storm has done much harm, but there's water enough now in the pool to turn the old mill for many a day."

These words were uttered with a degree of cheerfulness that one would scarcely have expected in a man of his appearance.

No sooner were the words pronounced than he stepped towards the water.

It now became clear that the singular-looking building was no other than a water-mill.

Having reached the water's edge, the man made his way to one particular portion of it, where some sluice gates were fixed.

His object evidently was to open them so as to allow

the water to flow sufficiently to set the water-wheel in action.

But no sooner did he reach the old, moss-grown sluice gates than he uttered a loud cry, which had the immediate effect of bringing his wife to the door of the cottage.

"What is it—what is it?" she asked.

"Here—here!" said the man. "Look here. Did you ever see the like?"

The woman hastened to place herself by her husband's side.

Then looked in the direction in which he pointed.

"Why," she gasped, "it's—it's a woman!"

"Yes—and a dead one."

"How came she there?"

"I know no better than yourself, for I have only just seen her."

"It is fortunate you did not open the gates."

"It is. If I had, nothing could have saved her from going under the wheel."

The reader probably comprehends that the stream down which Maud had been carried discharged itself into a large pool, which served the purpose of a reservoir to the mill.

This pool had but one outlet—the sluice gates.

It was against those that Maud had been carried, and it was to these she had clung with the tenacity of a drowning person.

The man and his wife gazed upon her for some moments in silence.

At length the woman spoke.

"Surely—surely, John," she said, "she must be dead!"

"Oh, yes, dead beyond a doubt! She cannot be alive! The great puzzle is, to me, how on earth she came there."

"What is to be done?"

"I don't know."

"If she is dead—"

"There is no 'if' about it!"

"Well—well, you need not be so sharp. As she is dead we shall probably find ourselves in some trouble!"

"How so?" asked the man, with a start of surprise.

"Why, as you know full well, we have more enemies than friends hereabouts, and when they come to hear of this we shall have hard work to persuade them that we have had no hand in this creature's death."

The man knit his brows savagely and muttered a curse.

"It's no good swearing!" said his wife. "What is to be done? Be quick and make up your mind!"

"What do you advise?"

"Advise?"

"Yes; let me hear what you have to propose. What do you consider would be the best?"

"Oh, how kind you are, to be sure, John," said his wife, with a sneer; "but don't think I am such a fool as to be taken in by you! Wouldn't you just like me to tell you what to do?"

"I should, for I don't know myself."

"Oh, of course not! You would like to put all the responsibility on my shoulders, so that if anything should arise from it you would be able to say, 'There, that's your doings!' No—no, John Costard, I am determined not to allow you the opportunity! There now!"

These words were pronounced in a very triumphant tone indeed, and their emphasis was increased by the manner in which she clapped her hands together at the conclusion.

The miller looked very wroth for a moment, but probably he had long ago learnt that any demonstration of anger was quite useless.

Therefore, smothering his resentment, he said, in a calm and quiet a tone as he could assume:

"Well, then, in my opinion the best thing that can be done is to get her out of the water at once and ascertain whether she is really dead or not."

"Very well, John Costard. Do just as you like. But I have one great consolation—you won't be able to blame me afterwards for what's done! That is a great consolation!"

The miller cursed again, but this time it was under his breath.

Without taking any further notice of his helpmate, he

bent himself seriously to the task of recovering the body of Maud.

This was no easy task, owing to the situation of the sluice gates.

After a short delay, however, the miller succeeded in slipping a rope round Maud's waist.

Then, crawling back to the shore, he, by means of it, pulled her towards him.

When near enough, he stooped down and lifted her on to the smooth grass by which the pool was bordered.

"I fancy she is dead," he muttered, after gazing at Maud for a few moments.

"Then if she is just let me ask you what is to become of us? We shall be found guilty of murder! What is to be done?"

"I should think we had better try all we possibly can to revive her; if we succeed there will be an end to that danger."

"Very well—do just as you like; I shall not have a word to say either way in the affair."

The fear these people had that a dead body would get them into trouble made them most anxious that Maud should recover.

By the assistance of his wife, the miller carried her into the house, and every means was used to restore her to sensibility.

But for a long time their efforts were quite in vain.

In removing her apparel, the weight of her dress was noticed.

The miller's wife was curious enough to ascertain the cause.

It was found to be the heavy purse which Maud carried, and the sight of which had excited the cupidity of the villainous innkeeper.

Even the miller's eyes gleamed when he caught sight of so much wealth.

The interior of his dwelling did indeed present a melancholy spectacle, for on all sides could be seen unmistakable tokens of the presence of the gaunt spectre Poverty.

For a long time things had gone badly with the miller.

The water which turned the mill had lately been very deficient in supply, and consequently his mill had rusted with disuse.

To him the purse of gold that his wife held up before his eyes represented wealth—a fortune.

"Put it away," he said, averting his eyes—"put it away! Do not tempt me with the sight!"

It was at this moment that Maud showed some signs of returning animation.

The woman's guilty conscience made her hastily secrete the gold, and immediately afterwards she was bending over the cold form with an appearance of hypocritical solicitude.

Wearily and heavily Maud opened her eyes.

The daylight confused and blinded her.

"What place is this?" she gasped. "What—oh, what has happened?"

The utterance of these words proved too much for the slight amount of strength which she then possessed.

Her eyes closed, and she again lapsed into unconsciousness.

The fears which had hitherto animated the minds of the miller and his wife were now at rest.

The latter, however, fixing her eyes upon her husband, said:

"What think you now will be the reward we shall receive for thus restoring her to life?"

"Reward?"

"Yes. How much do you think she will give us?"

The miller shook his head.

His wife stamped her foot impatiently, as she exclaimed:

"Answer me, dolt that you are—answer me, I say!"

"Something considerable, no doubt," replied the miller, in a voice of restraint.

"Yes—yes; but how much?"

"The contents of that purse, perhaps."

"Never fear; I'll warrant that is all she possesses, and I don't suppose, by the look of her, that she came by it honestly."

In good truth, poor Maud's outward appearance at this time was far from being prepossessing.

She bore upon her garments the marks of the many vicissitudes she had lately gone through, and in particular this last adventure had by no means improved them.

After a long discussion between themselves, it was determined by this precious pair that they would do the best they could for the stranger who had been in so peculiar a manner thrust upon their care, and that on her recovery they would trust to her generosity to reward them handsomely.

Accordingly, she was laid upon the only bed the place could boast, and it was not until this was done that the wound in her side was discovered.

The hemorrhage had for some time completely ceased. No doubt the sudden immersion into the cold water had had the effect of checking the flow of blood.

The first shock of surprise being over, the miller's wife set herself to work to examine it.

She quickly found that the hurt was by no means a serious one, and certainly not beyond her own powers of surgery.

With considerable skill she bandaged up the wound, and then waited patiently for Maud to show some symptoms of returning animation.

But she waited for a long and weary time—until, indeed, the whole of that day had passed—until the thick shadows of evening began to fill the apartment.

Suddenly, with a loud scream, Maud awoke as though from some dreadful dream.

She sprang up at once into a sitting posture, and gazed around her with a countenance upon which alarm was most vividly depicted.

"What is your fear?" said the miller's wife, somewhat gruffly. "Keep still, or you will make yourself worse than you already are."

The voice caused Maud to turn her eyes in the direction of the speaker.

Her gaze was one of inexpressible surprise and wonder.

It was quite evident that at present Maud had no idea of where she was, nor any recollection of what had happened.

"Tell me," she said at length, speaking with a great effort—"tell me where I am and how I came here?"

"Nay—nay," said the woman. "Be calm—be still. You shall know all in good time."

"Calm?" echoed Maud—"calm? You know not whom you speak, or you would not address such a word to me! Keep me not in suspense, I entreat you, but answer my question without delay!"

As she proceeded, Maud's agitation increased.

By degrees recollection was coming back to her, and all this time her heart painfully fluttered with dismay.

With that rapidity of which thought alone is capable, she followed up all the different events which had occurred to her until the fall from her horse, of which she had only a very slight and dim remembrance.

"Tell me," she said again, and with so much additional excitement that the miller's wife was afraid to withhold the information any longer.

Maud listened with a terror and alarm for which the narrator could not account.

"And—and," gasped Maud, with parting lips and panting breath, "you say that it was this morning—early this morning that you found me?"

"Yes, lady, at sunrise?"

"And now—what is it now?"

The woman looked bewildered.

"I mean, how long is it since then?"

"About twelve hours."

"Then it is close upon night?"

"It is. Do you not perceive that the room grows darker every moment?"

"I must go—I must go at once," said Maud, in shrieking tones. "I cannot stay here any longer—I must go this moment!"

"You cannot."

"Woman, do not be so cruel as to try to stop me! I tell you many lives hang upon my movements! Get me a horse. Fear not that I shall fail to reward you well!"

"But I say again you cannot."

Maud, with a cry of despair, slipped off the bed.

No sooner did her feet touch the ground, however,

than she became fully sensible of her extreme weakness.

She tried to move, but all motion was denied her.

"Lost—lost!" she cried, in a voice of such terrible anguish that it penetrated even to the heart of the miller's wife—"lost, now—all—is lost—lost—lost!"

And with these words upon her lips, she threw up her arms above her head, and sank down upon the floor again totally bereft of consciousness.

CHAPTER XXV.II.

DISCLOSES THE PERILOUS POSITION OF DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES AT THE OLD CASTLE.

To say that Dick Turpin and his comrades were astounded and amazed upon hearing the loud yells of the police officers and their triumphant cries as they clustered around the entrance to the subterranean chamber would only be to convey a very faint impression of the actual condition of their minds at this juncture.

Dick Turpin stopped short as though by some magical process he had been instantaneously transformed to stone.

His comrades paused as well, and gazed blankly at each other.

In this manner they remained until the first outburst of triumph on the part of the officers was over.

"Below, there!" cried Bishop, in a stentorian voice—"below, there, I say!"

This was probably intended as a summons for the highwaymen to reply; but if so, no notice was taken of it whatever.

"Surrender—surrender!" cried Bishop, "and so save your lives! Dick Turpin, give in game and handsome, as a fellow like you ought to. Our number more than trebles yours, and you are down there like rats in a trap. Escape is out of the question quite, so make the best of a bad job by giving in quietly!"

These words had the effect of dissolving the kind of spell which had hitherto pressed upon the minds of our friends.

So perfectly secure did they consider themselves in their present quarters, that when they first heard the sound of voices and the trampling of feet above they could scarcely believe that their ears had served them aright.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Tom King. "What is to be done?"

"Alas!" said Dick, "I now feel myself incapable of all action and direction."

"Nay—nay, captain! Look up! Do not suffer yourself to be cast down by this?"

Dick groaned.

"It is not of myself that I am thinking," he responded—"for my own part I care little, but it is Maud—Maud! What can have become of her?"

The uncertainty Dick Turpin was in about Maud's fate, and the apprehensions he experienced concerning it, unmanned him quite.

His companions witnessed it with genuine grief.

"Something must be done," remarked Claude Duval, after a brief pause. "Let us be quick and decide, or we shall have those fellows down upon us."

"But what can be done?" asked Tom King. "They have the advantage of us in every way. I believe any attempt at resistance would be perfectly futile."

A gloomy silence followed the expression of this opinion.

It was so fully shared in by everyone present that not a single word could be said.

As for Dick, he almost seemed as though every word uttered by his comrades was lost upon him, so absorbed was he by his grief for Maud.

The officers, however, by no means seemed to relish the idea of descending the steps.

They much preferred remaining where they were.

A short time having elapsed, however, Bishop bent over the abyss, and in as loud a voice as he possibly could, shouted out:

"Dick Turpin and the rest of you, listen to what I say. I will give you three minutes to consider my proposal, and if at the end of that time we hear nothing from you we shall use our weapons, for this time we are determined to have you, alive or dead! If we suffered

you to slip through our fingers on such an occasion as this we should be a laughing-stock for the whole country! Are you listening to what I say?"

The same profound silence was preserved by the highwaymen—

A silence that made the officers begin to feel rather uncomfortable.

Tom Davis all this time had been too dumbfounded to open his lips.

Indeed, the whole place being strange to him, he scarcely comprehended his position.

Yet it was singular that when he did speak he was the first to propound a really practical question.

"Is there no other way of getting out of this place except that by which we have entered it?"

Sixteen-String Jack started at this question.

"A way might be made," he answered, "if those fellows would only allow us the time to do it."

Tom Davis shook his head.

"Is it possible," he asked, "that you have remained here so long without taking care to have several exits? That ought to have been your first care."

"It ought; but it's too late to talk of that now."

Tom Davis was much grieved to observe the apathy which had settled upon the captain.

No one, however, knew Turpin's disposition better than he did, and on the present occasion he hastened to make use of his knowledge.

Touching his old companion on the arm, he said:

"Dick, if you were by yourself, and had no one depending upon you whatever, this total abandonment to grief could be defended. As it is, we are here awaiting your judgment and commands, therefore the indulgence is unjust."

Dick raised his head.

His voice was trembling and almost inarticulate as he replied:

"Tom, you can form no opinion of my feelings, because you have never known what it is to sustain such a fearful loss. However, I must admit that your reproof is just, and therefore, shaking off as well as I can all my own private sorrows, I will do my best to obtain your safety."

"That is spoken like yourself. Now, then, tell us what to do. The officers surround the opening above, so that there is no hope whatever of making our escape that way. As we ascended the steps, we could be picked off one by one, like sparrows; and you may depend the officers would not hesitate to do it."

"No; that is certain."

"I have just been blaming you all," said Tom Davis, "that you did not provide against such a contingency as this by making another outlet."

"It should have been done."

"But it is not," said Claude, "and therefore to talk about it now is only to waste precious time."

"Right," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but if you will go to the foot of the flight of steps, I will show you a passage which I have partially explored."

"And whither does it lead?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"That I cannot tell you."

"Do you know whether there is an outlet?"

"I do not yet. I fancy one might be made."

"Why?"

"Because I could feel fresh air."

"Let us go there, then."

"With all my heart," said Jack; "for we cannot possibly make our position worse by moving from one part of this subterranean place to another."

No sooner were these words spoken than, with the greatest amount of caution possible, they made their way back to the foot of the steps.

Careful as they were yet it would seem that their approach had not been made without reaching the keen ears of the officers above.

"Be ready," they heard Bishop say, in a suppressed voice—"be ready, for I can hear them coming. Perhaps they intend to make a rush. If so, discharge all your pistols at once down the staircase. We cannot fail to have every one of them then."

Bishop uttered this cold-blooded command in the calmest and most business-like tone possible to conceive.

Dick could not avoid shuddering as he heard it, for he thought of what Maud's fate was likely to be, if she had

fallen into such hands; and he believed she had, for all circumstances seemed to point to this conclusion.

"Below there!" cried Bishop, again. "Did you hear what I said? Are you inclined to accept my proposal or not? At any rate, I shall wait no longer."

"Hilloa!" said Turpin, though the tone in which he pronounced the word was so unlike his usual voice, that his comrades could scarcely believe that he had spoken.

"Oh," said Bishop, "you have found a voice at last, have you? How do you feel down there now?"

"Much the same as you do above."

"Oh, do you? Perhaps you intend that for a joke. If you do, I can assure you you will find in a little while that you will be ready to laugh the other side of your mouth."

"Oh, shall we! I suppose you are not content with the one capture you have made, eh?"

Now these words were spoken by Dick with a view if possible of ascertaining something about Maud.

Surely, he thought, if Bishop had made her a prisoner this would elicit some remark concerning her.

But Bishop had not been successful enough to do anything of the kind.

Therefore, Dick's words were not a little enigmatical to him.

In the course of a moment, however, that sagacity for which he was so famous suggested that Dick must refer to the capture of himself and companions.

To Dick's great surprise, then, the astute officer answered:

"Yes, I am tolerably satisfied, because I know you cannot escape. I am only waiting to have you securely bound, and then my satisfaction will be complete."

"Will it?"

"Yes, decidedly; and now listen to reason: You must by this time have realized that you are completely trapped—yes, trapped is the word. We could starve you into submission if we only liked to wait and take the trouble; or by making a sudden descent we could, by one volley down the passage, sweep every one of you from the earth. But you are a decent fellow, Dick, and I should be sorry to take your life; I have a respect for you, and I hope you will surrender quietly to my power in order that I may have the credit of having captured you alive."

"You are remarkably kind," said Dick, in a sarcastic voice. "Perhaps you will allow me to speak to my companions and ask them whether they prefer being shot down by your pistols or whether they will give in quietly?"

Bishop concluded from this speech that he really had a chance of achieving what he so wished to accomplish. He believed he could perceive the symptoms of an inclination to yield without bloodshed.

It was, therefore, while labouring under this pleasing but delusive impression that he said:

"You shall never say that I did not treat you properly, so I will give you two minutes to decide."

Bishop thought he was arranging matters very cleverly indeed.

Not so Isaac, who proclaimed his disgust in loud tones.

"You're a d—d fool!" he remarked, in an audible voice, as soon as Bishop had concluded the last sentence.

The chief officer turned round and cried, indignantly:

"Who, sir?"

"Why, you, of course! Did you imagine more than one was in the company?"

"I know there is one," said Bishop, with a significant glance; "and what is more, he is an intermeddler and a busybody besides!"

"I understand your insinuation, but I don't hesitate to call you a blundering fool, nevertheless; and what is more still, I wash my hands entirely of this affair—I will have no more to do with it!"

"Very well, please yourself!"

"The idea," muttered Isaac, "of a man being foolish enough to stand at the top of a flight of steps while he knows those he wants are below, and, instead of rushing down upon them at once, kindly gives them as much time as they want to make an escape!"

"Hold your row!" said Bishop, savagely.

"I shall speak if I like; and this I will say, I have wondered many and many a time how on earth it was

that Dick Turpin and his comrades have managed to avoid capture on such a many occasions. But I shall wonder no longer, for I daresay your brother officers have been kind enough to allow them every opportunity of escape, as you have!"

"How escape?" asked Bishop, contemptuously. "If you must make your voice heard, do let us have the satisfaction of now and then hearing a few words of sense! How can they escape, you idiot? Ain't they as fast as rats in a trap?"

"Don't you make too sure of that, my friend!—don't you make too sure! However, I am clear of the whole affair now; and whether you capture them or whether you don't does not signify to me in the least degree. I know I should have acted very differently under the same circumstances!"

"And pray," said Bishop, puffing on as sneering a tone and manner as he knew how—"and pray may I make so bold as to venture to ask what my very wise friend would have done under the circumstances?"

The mock humility which Bishop displayed, he thought, was cutting in the utmost degree.

"Yes," said Isaac, "I will tell you, though I don't suppose you will have the sense to act up to it on another occasion."

"Well, well—I'm a-waiting."

"Well, the moment they descended, instead of flourishing my arms about and bawling aloud like a madman, as you did, I should have rushed as speedily as I could down the steps and should have had hold of every man Jack of them before they had the least idea of what was the matter."

"Very clever—very clever indeed," and Bishop, who nevertheless could not help inwardly succumbing to the conviction that the course of action proposed by Isaac was by far the most rational and the most likely to succeed.

The allotted time had by this time expired, so Bishop approached more closely to the secret entrance.

He was much annoyed with himself, and just in the humour to be put out by any trifle.

A most ominous silence seemed to him to prevail below.

He would not allow any signs of his anxiety to manifest themselves in his countenance, though he could not altogether control a slight unsteadiness in his voice.

"Time's up," he said—"time's up, Dick. Have you made up your mind? Whether you have or have not, I can't wait any longer. Dick, I say, have you made up your mind?"

No reply whatever came to this inquiry.

The men began to murmur.

As for Isaac, he, by various contemptuous and aggravating actions, expressed that this was just what he expected.

"Told you so," he cried—"told you so! You kindly gave them the time and opportunity they required, and by this time are far enough off, laughing at your monstrous credulity."

This speech, and the disagreeable inward conviction that what Isaac stated was no more than the truth, put the finishing stroke to Bishop's aggravation.

He could stand these taunts no longer.

Clenching his fists, he rushed up to the spot where Isaac stood with the intention of administering severe bodily chastisement to that individual.

But Isaac was prepared for him.

With that calmness which was so habitual to him, and which had such an aggravating effect upon almost everybody, he stepped back, and, clenching his fists, struck out straight from his shoulder just as Bishop was rushing up to him.

The consequence was that the last-named gentleman's nose came into most violent contact with Isaac's fist.

Indeed, such was the force of the blow that Bishop's onward career was instantaneously checked and a contrary direction imparted to his motion, inasmuch that he staggered back several paces.

"How do you like that?" said Isaac, more imperiously cool than ever. "If you are not satisfied with that you had better come on again, my ancient Trojan."

But either Bishop had come a little more to his senses, or else the stunning blow upon his nose had cowed him.

for he showed no symptoms nor inclinations of renewing the contest.

Wiping away the ensanguined stream that flowed from his nostrils, he returned to the secret entrance.

"No more dallying," he said to his men, who could not help smiling at his ludicrous appearance. "Down with you! Take them alive or dead!"

The officers, it would seem, were a little stung by the taunts to which Isaac had given utterance, for with a great assumption of boldness and courage they dashed down the steps.

Some had taken the precaution to provide themselves with lights, and as soon as these reached the bottom they held them aloft.

A ruddy light was cast around.

But it fell only on the damp walls.

The highwaymen were nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER MXIX.

MR. BISHOP TRIES A SHOT AT BLACK BESS.

OF this, however, Bishop was ignorant, for he very prudently kept in the rear, and did not reach the bottom of the steps until after all the others.

"Down with them!" he cried, now thoroughly infuriated, and only too glad to find some object to expend his wrath upon. "No quarter! Shoot them down and make an end of it!"

The officers were silent.

Of course, as there was no one to be seen, no discharge of weapons took place.

"Why don't you fire?" yelled Bishop.

"There's nobody here, sir."

"Nobody here?" he screamed. "Forward—forward, they can't have got away—they must be somewhere close at hand."

The loud, mocking laugh of Isaac above, who had heard what had passed, made the officer's blood boil in his veins.

The next moment he stood at the bottom of the steps.

When here, he had ample proof that his men had spoken correctly.

Not a trace of the highwaymen could be seen.

The men, however, in obedience to his commands, had rushed along the passage into the chamber habitually occupied by those of whom they were in quest.

But not the least trace could be perceived of them here.

"This way, idiots!" roared Bishop—"this way! Can't you see? this way! Where are your eyes, dolts?"

The officers hastened to place themselves by the side of their leader.

He was pointing to a passage that branched off from the bottom of the stairs, but which, strangely enough, they had not noticed.

"That is the way," he said. "Quick—quick! they have not had time to get far off. Quick—quick, I say!"

The officers hurried down the passage with great alacrity.

They could feel that fresh air was blowing in their faces, and this circumstance caused them to push on at the greatest speed they were capable of making.

In a short time they found the passage communicated with a series of vaults or dungeons.

They did not turn aside or pause to attempt to enter any one of them, for the strong massive doors were all closed, and had been apparently for many centuries.

Moreover, they fancied they could hear in advance the trampling of footsteps, though probably the sound was no more than the echo of their own feet.

Suddenly they came to a door that was partly shut.

Pushing it open, they found themselves in an arched stone chamber.

At one time it had been used as a repository for the dead, as numerous coffins, or, rather, the remains of them, could be seen stacked up in niches against the walls.

Upon these, however, the officers scarcely bestowed a glance.

Their attention was attracted and absorbed by the dusky figure of a man which they could indistinctly see creeping through the window—or, more properly speaking, the grated aperture at the end of the vault furthest from the door.

"Fire—fire!" roared Bishop. "Why do you p—
Fire—fire!"

Half a dozen of his men obeyed his command.

In the confined space, the noise resulting from the simultaneous discharge of so many firearms was something terrific.

Mingling with the loud report came a loud splash as of some heavy body falling from a considerable height into water.

The vault was instantaneously filled with dense blue smoke, which the light of the torches could not penetrate.

"On—on!" cried Bishop, setting the example of rushing forward.

His men kindly gave him place, and allowed him to take the lead.

The disappointment and rage of the chief officer at the present juncture are beyond all expression.

But what most galled him was not his defeat, but the mockery of Isaac to which he would be subjected.

At the extremity of the vault, and rather high up from the ground, was an aperture in the stone wall.

It was not much wider or higher than was requisite to permit the passage of a man's body through it.

Being near the foundation of the old castle, the wall was of uncommon thickness.

The aperture gradually widened to about double the size at the other end.

By the aid of his men, Bishop was raised up sufficiently high to enable him to crawl along this tube—for this was what it more resembled than aught else.

He called aloud to his men to follow him speedily.

So little time had been lost by these proceedings that when he reached the end he caught sight of those of whose capture he had a little while before made so sure.

But upon reaching the extremity of the aperture Bishop paused, and well he might.

At a distance of about fifteen feet below him was a wide sheet of water, which, from its appearance and situation, was no doubt the remains of the moat which had at one time surrounded the castle.

In the act of swimming across this piece of water was Sixteen-String Jack.

His comrades were all standing on the opposite bank, shaking and wringing the wet from their apparel.

Bishop's position was a most awkward one, yet nevertheless he endeavoured to draw a pistol from one of his pockets.

The attempt was very nearly costing him a good ducking, for he leaned forward so much that he all but lost his balance.

Dick Turpin divined his intention, and producing a pistol, levelled it at him.

"Retreat, Bishop, retreat, and leave us in peace! Retreat, I say, or I fire!"

Bishop had a conviction that from that distance Dick's bullet would be unpleasantly effective, so he drew back with a suddenness that was ludicrous.

"Back again!" he cried to the men. "Up the steps, and run round to the other side of the keep—they are all there, and if you are speedy you may yet be in time! Down with them, if you have the chance! Show them no mercy!"

An immediate movement followed this injunction.

The men had made so sure of gaining the large reward on the present occasion that they could not bear to entertain the idea that they were about to lose it.

At any rate, they determined upon making a last great effort.

Accordingly, very little time was lost by them in gaining the upper air.

To tell the truth, they much preferred being there to groping about in the subterranean portion of an old ruined castle.

For a brief space, however, we will return to the movements of the highwaymen, which must to our readers possess infinitely more interest than the doings of the police officers. Already a tolerably good idea can be formed of the manner in which the escape from the subterranean passages had been accomplished.

Isaac little thought how truly he spoke when he said that the two minutes' delay granted by Bishop was just what the highwaymen wanted to allow them to get off.

Such, however, actually proved to be the case.

Sixteen-String Jack, who had been the first to mention



[DICK TURPIN ASKS BLACK GILES A QUESTION.]

the other passage, set the example of hastening along it as soon as the conference between Bishop and Dick Turpin was brought to a conclusion.

The others followed quickly in his footsteps.

Upon reaching the dungeon doors we have already mentioned, the Highwaymen were in doubt whether it would be policy to open any of them or to rush on.

The latter was the course agreed upon by the general voice.

On arriving at the vault at the extremity, a little delay took place in consequence of the difficulty which they experienced of opening the door.

The rusty old fastening had to be removed by force, and consequently they had no means of securing the door, and so use that as a protection between themselves and their foes.

The aperture quickly attracted their attention

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Dick mounted first, and crawling along, encountered a large iron grating.

But time and the weather had had such a destructive effect upon it, that a few hearty shakes enabled him to dislodge it altogether from its setting.

He released it from his grasp, and it fell with a terrific splash into the water below.

The sound caused Dick great apprehension, for he made sure that it would be heard all over the ruins.

Looking forward, he found that the iron grating had covered a kind of loophole in the outer wall of the castle, that was at a considerable altitude from a large sheet of water.

Escape lay in this direction, yet it was by no means pleasant to think of taking a head-foremost plunge from such a height, and without any knowledge as to the depth of the water.

Yet there was no resource.

The dimensions of the apartment were so confined, and the stonework so very smooth and slippery, that to turn round seemed a matter of impossibility.

Looking back over his shoulder, Dick explained the situation and the difficulties of it to his comrades.

Tom King was next to him, so he said:

"Hold my hands, and I will endeavour to descend feet first."

Dick tried, and succeeded.

He dropped with unpleasant force into the moat, the depth of the water in which was by no means so great as he had expected.

In fact, when he stood upright the water reached no higher than his waist.

It was lucky he did not try to plunge head first.

If he had he must have sustained some injury.

No sooner did he find himself in safety on his feet than he dashed the water from his face, and said, in cautious tones:

"Come, Tom—it is all right! Be quick, and we shall escape them yet!"

Tom King needed no further bidding.

Following his leader's example, he lowered himself without hesitation.

Dick was standing ready to receive him, so that Tom made the descent with comparative ease.

Tom Davis followed; but as he was of much greater bulk, and by no means so agile in his movements as the highwaymen, he failed to turn, and came down with a splash almost loud enough to rouse the people in the next village.

However, all continued silent.

Apparently no alarm had been given.

Claude followed.

Last of all came Sixteen-String Jack.

He found he laboured under a considerable disadvantage, for he had no comrade to hold him by the hand while he turned round.

Nevertheless, in spite of this and a certain amount of awkwardness resulting from his wound, he accomplished the feat successfully.

But he was just in time, and that was all.

The delay of another couple of seconds must have cost him his life.

Nothing could have saved him when, by the direction of Bishop, the officers fired that volley into the loophole.

Indeed, so little was Jack beforehand that the splash which he made by falling into the water, and the discharge of the pistols, seemed simultaneous sounds.

What occurred on the appearance of Bishop we have already described.

The highwaymen and Tom Davis waded quickly to the bank, and did not fail to congratulate each other when they once again found themselves on firm earth.

Perceiving how impossible it was to do anything in his present position, and influenced to a very great extent by the pistol which Dick Turpin had pointed so calmly at him, Bishop, as we have already stated, beat a precipitate and very undignified retreat.

With all the speed he could make, he followed his men on their way to the staircase.

"If we had but our horses," exclaimed Claude Dural, "we should be able to get clear off without much further trouble."

"Or," added Sixteen-String Jack, "by making good speed, we might be able to reach the secret entrance first. We could then close it and make them every one prisoners."

There was a general laugh at this proposition of turning the tables upon the officers, in which Dick Turpin himself could not help joining.

"It is not half a bad idea," said Claude, quickly; "and to prove that I think so, I will try to carry it into effect."

It was a matter that would not allow of discussion, for while the pros and cons were being considered the opportunity would be gone.

All the rest followed rapidly in Claude's footsteps—not that they thought his scheme was likely to be carried out, but because it was necessary for them to go in that direction to recover their horses.

With a great deal of confidence, Claude hurried for-

ward and actually was just in time to close the secret door as the first of the returning officers was about to emerge.

That gentleman, to his very great astonishment, found the door suddenly banged in his face, and then the whole of them were in total darkness, for the concussion of the air consequent upon the discharge of the pistols had extinguished their lights.

But this act very nearly cost Claude his life.

Of course our friends knew nothing about Isaac and his companion, both of whom had been left outside by Bishop.

The former, seeing Claude and guessing from his actions who he was, carefully levelled a pistol.

By great good fortune Dick espied him and fired as well, but without having time to take any particular aim.

Nevertheless, his shot produced just the effect he intended it should.

It startled Isaac and distracted his attention at a very critical time.

Isaac fired, but the careful aim was lost.

Nevertheless, the bullet whistled past Claude in much too close proximity to be at all pleasant.

"This way, Claude," cried Dick Turpin, in a loud voice—"this way! Quick—quick! we shall yet be in time!"

Isaac no sooner perceived how very much he was outnumbered than he very prudently desisted from any further hostilities, and our friends were not the sort of men to seek vengeance for what had occurred.

The cooped-up police officers, however, upon hearing the discharge of firearms, became greatly infuriated.

Loud blows were rained upon the door.

But it was strong, and withstood them well.

They were not in the secret of opening it, and had not Isaac and his companion been outside, the highwaymen would have been able to take it very easily.

No sooner, however, had the latter vanished round a projection of the masonry in quest of their horses, than Isaac with great haste ran to the door.

He was not in possession of the secret, but, his efforts from without, joined to those of the officers on the other side, quickly demolished the door.

On they rushed in such hurry and confusion that the entrance for a moment was choked completely up.

No sooner, however, had Dick and his friends got out of sight than the former said:

"Some inward presentiment—for I can call it nothing else—seems to assure me that shortly before our arrival Maud must have been made prisoner by some of these men. If so, she is now in the ruins, in which case, as I need scarcely say, I cannot think of retreat until she is rescued."

His companions remained silent, waiting to hear what he would say next.

Dick continued:

"To get the horses will probably occupy a few minutes. While you are thus engaged, I will take a stealthy look round and try to ascertain where they have bestowed her."

"Dick."

"Yes, Tom?"

"I am your comrade, am I not?"

"Certainly."

"We are all your comrades," cried the rest.

"And, therefore," added Tom, "we will all join you in your search."

"Many—many thanks!" said Dick. "I should be glad to believe that my poor Maud occupies a warm place in all your hearts."

"She does—she does—believe us, she does."

"Well then, my friends," said Dick, in a voice which displayed how deeply he has affected, "you can render me signal aid by dispersing yourselves all over the ruins, as then we should search narrowly every part—that is," he concluded, "if you are willing to run so much extra risk solely on my behalf, when the path of your own safety lies clear and plain before you, if you only choose to avail yourselves of it."

Tom and the rest scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this speech, but separated at once, and without hesitation, in order to do their captain's bidding.

Of course, being acquainted with the exact nature of all the events that have occurred, the reader knows how

very erroneous was Dick's impression regarding Maud's presence in the ruins.

But a moment's reflection will show that this idea was of all others the one most likely to fix itself in his mind, and one about which there was the strongest degree of probability.

What a pity it was that he and his companions should run this perfectly unnecessary and frightful risk, for, of course, the search would prove totally resultless as Maud was at that time many miles away from the place.

The length of stay, however, which our friends had made at the ruins had enabled them to become well acquainted with all its intricacies.

Therefore the search when once made would be a thorough one, and executed without any loss of time by going over the same ground twice.

As the reader is aware, no trace of Maud or Jack the ostler could be seen.

Dick was distracted.

Rather than abandon his preconceived idea, he contented that she must have been conveyed to some other place.

Very certain, however, was it that she was nowhere about the ruins.

Thus was much valuable time lost, and thus were the officers enabled to improve their position in no inconsiderable degree.

For a brief space, then, we will leave them, and revert to the energetic proceedings which were now taken by the police officers.

CHAPTER MXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RESENTS BISHOP'S COWARDLY SHOT.

BISHOP now was in such an exalted state of exasperation that there is no knowing what absurdity he might have been guilty of had he not happened to catch a remark which fell from the lips of Isaac, and which brought about a condition of partial calmness.

Isaac's remark was this:

"There, I have done with you now—I am determined to have no further hand in the affair; yet, if I had the conduct of it, I should take care to secure the horses belonging to the rascals; it would not be very difficult, and they would find it by no means so easy to get away."

Bishop seized upon the hint at once.

But he pretended not to have overheard one word that Isaac had said.

Summoning his men around him, he gave them the order to, first of all, bend all their energies towards capturing the horses.

An immediate move was made to carry out this direction.

Isaac observed this with a contemptuous, sarcastic smile, but he made no remark.

In his own mind, he was exceedingly sorry to think he had made the suggestion, for his feelings towards Bishop now were of such a character that he really wished the highwaymen to escape in order that he might have the opportunity of exercising his powers of aggravation to the utmost advantage.

The officers were not long in making the discovery that they were just a few minutes too late.

Having satisfied themselves that Maud was nowhere in the ruins, the highwaymen, with the exception of Dick, had taken their horses, and had seated themselves in readiness to start.

But Turpin could not by any means divest himself of the notion that Maud must be there, for he could scarcely think that she had succeeded in making her escape.

It was thus being animated by this feeling that made Dick unable to tear himself away from the castle.

Systematic as the search had been, he was by no means satisfied with it, and therefore lingered until the very latest moment, in the hope of making the much-wished-for discovery.

Suddenly, the officers burst upon the highwaymen.

Claude Duval had taken Tom Davis up into the saddle behind him.

Black Bess was standing at a little distance.

Self-preservation compelled the highwaymen to shift from their position, but they took good care to do so in such a manner that they would prove a partial defence to their captain, to whom they cried aloud at the top of their voices.

"Fire!" yelled Bishop—"fire, I say!"

The order was immediately obeyed, and it was only by making a sudden movement that our friends saved themselves from being riddled by the bullets, which clattered against the stone walls like rain.

It was immediately after this discharge that Bishop caught sight of Black Bess.

He recognised the noble creature instantly.

In a moment the impulse seized upon him to try and capture her.

She was standing there so still and quiet that he fancied the capture would not be a very difficult one.

Not only would Black Bess herself prove to be to him a most valuable acquisition, but if he had her in his hands his chances of capturing her owner would be very much increased.

His men wondered what on earth he was about when they saw him walk quietly forward, for he did not utter one syllable as to his intention.

Black Bess still retained her former attitude.

But she was not unaware of the police officer's approach, as could be seen by the manner in which she projected her ears towards him.

Bishop put into practice all the coaxing ways he could think of.

His heart beat with exultation, for he got closer and closer, and still Black Bess did not stir.

He reached out his hand as soon as he believed himself near enough to clutch the bridle, and made a sudden effort.

But his fingers did not so much as touch the loosely-dangling reins.

Black Bess divined his intention, and gave a sudden bound, that had the effect of making the distance between herself and her would-be captor about the same as it was at first.

Bishop was never blessed with a very patient temper, and now it was exacerbated to such a degree that the moment anything went wrong he fell into a kind of fury that more resembled the transport of a lunatic than an outbreak of passion on the part of a sane person.

"D—n you!" he cried, savagely, "I believe you are no better than a witch! No human horse could have done what you have, and escaped with your life so many times! I will make one more attempt to seize you, and if that fails I will try whether you will be proof against one of my pistol bullets!"

Bishop had a loaded pistol in his hand, and while he spoke these words he rapidly cocked it.

Then advanced in the direction of the spot to which Black Bess was standing.

But this time the gallant animal distrusted him more than before.

She seemed ready to start at once.

Suddenly a faint chirping sound was heard—

A sound which more resembled the twittering of some little bird than aught else.

It was Dick Turpin's well-known signal.

No sooner did it strike upon the ears of Black Bess than she gave a rapid bound, which carried her clear over the trunk of a fallen tree that happened to be lying near her.

"Curse the beast!" said Bishop. "I could have wished her alive, for she's a beauty; but I will put a stop to her galloping for the future!"

With this he took as good an aim as he could.

His finger pressed the trigger.

There was a loud report.

Mingled with it was a faint sporting sound, but so faint and so brief that it was hard to say whether it was reality or fancy.

Bishop shouted aloud to his men, and immediately rushed forward.

He was in hopes of making a capture of Dick Turpin himself, for he gave a shrewd guess as to the meaning of the twittering sound.

In a general way, Bishop took good care not to push himself too forward, for fear he should by chance lose his

life, which would have been a serious calamity for the world at large.

On the present occasion, however, his impetuosity carried him more forward than usual, and he soon had occasion to repent it.

All at once Dick Turpin started into view.

Bishop came to a halt at once, and felt for another pistol.

The former, however, cried in a stern, menacing voice:

"You are welcome to try as many shots upon me as you like—I don't mind it, and should never seek for vengeance on that account; but to aim at my mare is an action that I can neither forget nor forgive! Take that—you deserve it, for I believe bouny Black Bess has been severely injured by your dastardly shot!"

While speaking these words, Dick Turpin levelled a pistol full at Bishop's head, and pulled the trigger.

But the weapon only flashed in the pan.

Dick gave utterance to an angry exclamation, and at the same time hurled the pistol with all his force.

His resentment was now worked up to its highest pitch.

So accurate was his aim that Bishop fell to the ground stunned.

But more than this Dick did not wait to see, for the officers now came rushing upon him in a body.

"On, Bess!" cried Turpin, as he ran hastily after her—"on, old lass! Do not stop for me; I can mount easily as you are!"

Black Bess cantered on.

Dick Turpin put forth all his powers.

The officers perceiving him run before them, gave him hearty chase.

They strained every nerve, for they felt that if once they permitted him to mount, all chance of overtaking him was at an end, or nearly so.

But there were few fleet runners than Dick.

A few seconds enabled him to place himself side by side with Black Bess, for the noble creature doubtless comprehended his purpose, and adapted her pace accordingly.

Suddenly, Dick seized hold of the saddle, and while thus holding it, ran for a moment or so by her side.

Then, giving a sudden spring, he swung himself clearly and lightly into the saddle, where he seated himself in a moment.

His comrades had viewed all these proceedings, but without having a chance of interfering in any way.

No sooner, however, did they perceive their captain mounted than they put spurs to their steeds and galloped off.

Some little delay took place before the officers were ready to pursue them, and by the time the former fairly started, Dick and his comrades had got to a considerable distance.

Still, in the present state of their tempers, it was not likely that the officers would very readily abandon the pursuit.

Bishop, however, was in a state of utter unconsciousness, and therefore unable to join in the chase.

For a time he was oblivious of all things.

Those officers who actually commenced the pursuit began in good earnest.

They were also very well mounted, and therefore, not unreasonably, they looked forward to a satisfactory termination to this troublesome piece of business.

Had not the highwaymen been hampered with Tom Davis, their chances of escape would have been very much increased.

Claude's horse was a powerful one, and carried him with tolerable ease, it is true, but then, had it not been for the double load his rate of speed would have been very much greater.

Of course the others accommodated the pace of their horses to his, for it was important they should all keep together.

Tom Davis soon rightly comprehended his position.

"Put me down," he said. "I can see just how the land lies, and it would be much better that I should be recaptured than that you should all run the risk of another encounter."

"And is that the sort of return, Tom, that you think we should make for the unwavering fidelity you have

shown us? No, no, we know better how to serve a friend than that."

"Say no more upon the subject," said Tom King. "Either we will place you in some place of complete security, or else we will perish in the attempt."

Dick Turpin paid but little attention to this conversation.

The pace at which they were going was one that Black Bess could perform without the slightest effort.

As for the injury she had received, it fortunately turned out quite contrary to Dick's fears.

It was what might be termed a trivial one.

The bullet had passed very near to the top part of her head—

So close that it had cut out a small circular piece from the extreme tip of one ear.

The blood flowed freely—but that was in consequence of the motion—but not in any quantity to excite apprehension.

But Dick's heart burned with anger within him as he gazed upon it.

Patting her upon the neck, he muttered:

"A very little more, and there would have been an end to the best piece of horseflesh in the kingdom. The difference of a hair's breadth in pulling the trigger, and the bullet must have entered her brain! It's an escape, old lass, and a narrow one. Most thankful am I that it is no worse!"

But the satisfaction derived by Dick from this reflection was but slight, for the mark was one which his mare would always carry.

Another consideration now pressed itself upon him.

What steps should be taken to shake off the officers who, although not able to get up to our friends, nevertheless succeeded in keeping at a uniform distance behind them?

In a short time morning would be upon them, and Dick felt the stern necessity of shaking off his foes before that time.

The question was, how could it be done?

"Claude," he cried, turning back, "those fellows behind us seem to me to be coming on as fast as they are able."

"They keep well on our track."

"They do, and I want to shake them off"

"How is it to be done?"

"Do you think that for a short distance you could push your horse on faster? If so, we shall soon distance them, and when once out of sight we can adopt twenty expedients if necessary."

But Claude shook his head.

"I wish you would make the effort," said Dick, with an air and tone of vexation. "I don't want to get any further away from the ruins than I can help, and, besides, it will soon be daylight."

"Wait a bit," said Tom King. "If you put Davis behind me, that will give Claude's horse a rest. He seems fatigued already, and for a little while I am sure my horse can push on well."

"Be it so, then. I can see only one objection, and that is, the delay caused in changing. You must be speedy in your movements."

"You had better leave me behind," said Tom Davis; "that will be the easiest. I might slip off and conceal myself behind the hedge without the officers being any the wiser."

"You might, it is true; but we do not intend to give you the chance. No, no, Tom—we would never be so base as to desert you. So say not another word, but jump up as quickly as you can."

The delay caused by this change was really very slight, and no sooner was it effected than a wonderful difference was made in their speed.

Tom King pressed his horse hard without scruple, for he knew that it would only be a sharp touch and soon over, and not so much calculated to distress him as a long, continued gallop.

In order that he might not relax in his endeavours, the others kept a few yards in advance.

The natural spirit of Tom's horse, therefore, made him endeavour to overtake or, at least, keep pace with the others.

The officers observed this alteration with much alarm and dissatisfaction.

They spurred their horses again and again, but to no purpose.

The horses were already going at their best speed.

To their unmitigated chagrin, they perceived the distance between them and the fugitives gradually but surely widening.

They felt then that they might almost as well confess themselves beaten; but yet they could not at present bring themselves to admit it.

As for the highwaymen, the success they had met with served to inspire them to make fresh exertions.

At length, when Dick considered that a safe distance had been placed between the officers and themselves, he began to look out for some narrow turning that would enable them to leave the high-road.

Some time elapsed before anything of the kind presented itself; but at length he caught sight of a cross-road—it was too wide to be called a lane.

At this spot stood the remains of what had once been a finger-post.

It had now fallen into thorough decay.

The upright post leaned far out of the perpendicular, and was thickly overgrown with moss, the dampness of which materially served to rot the wood.

One arm, and only one, was remaining, and that was in so mutilated a state that it was impossible to discern any lettering upon it.

Seen by the very dim gray light which now began to creep over the landscape, this finger-post had an inexpressibly forlorn and dreary look.

"This way!" shouted Dick, to Tom King, and pointing to the left while he spoke—"this way: One more push, and then I hope we shall be able to take it more easily."

It did not appear that this cross-road was made much use of, for in the middle were two very deep ruts, and all the rest was overgrown with grass so tall that it reached up to the horses' knees.

Over this their progress could not fail to be silent.

Having gone to some distance, Dick pulled up.

"My friends," he said, "I have an idea; let me know what you think of it."

They prepared to listen intently.

"It strikes me very forcibly that as soon as ever the officers come to the finger-post they will guess which way we have gone, and then, although we may be rid of them for a time, yet they will eventually plague us."

To this all assented.

"Now, what I want to do is to throw them off the track altogether, so as to leave us free to adopt any course we may think proper, without having the dread of their appearance at any unexpected moment upon us."

"That would be very desirable indeed," said Tom King; "but, for my own part, I don't see how it is to be accomplished."

"Listen, and I will tell you my idea—it is only an idea, mind you, and if you don't like it, why, do not, out of any consideration for me or my judgment, omit to say it—promise me that."

"We promise, Dick; but do not keep us any longer in suspense."

"I will not."

The highwaymen were silent, and prepared themselves to listen with the utmost intentness to what Dick Turpin had to say.

CHAPTER MXXI.

DICK TURPIN ASKS BLACK BESS A QUESTION.

"My idea I consider is a very simple one," began Dick Turpin, "and yet perhaps you may think it very extraordinary. It is, to quit this lane at once, and, completely doubling our course, make our way back to the ruins."

"To the ruins?" echoed Tom King, in a tone of voice which showed plainly enough how much he was surprised.

"Just so," answered Dick, gravely.

"But you surely do not think of entering them again?"

"No, I can't say that I do. My intention is merely to get back to their vicinity, for I believe that is about the

last place where the officers would think of looking for us."

"Perhaps so," said Tom King.

"At any rate," added Claude Duval, "it would be much better to do that than to attempt to seek any shelter hereabouts, for if we did we should be disturbed in an hour or two at the most."

"I see you are getting reconciled to the idea," continued Dick, "and let me request you to make up your minds quickly."

"You are captain," said Sixteen-String Jack—"the direction of our movements ought to be left to you."

"I know all about that, but the best of generals is not the one who relies most on his own judgment, but the one who in situations of doubt and difficulty holds a consultation with his chief and most experienced officers."

"Then I for one," cried Claude Duval, "am inclined to adopt Dick's idea."

"It is certain," remarked Tom King, "that we must ere long get shelter somewhere. In a little while daylight will be full upon us, and such a party as we now make could not pass anywhere without attracting a great deal of notice."

"Our horses are weary," said Dick; "we must rest, and, what is more, it is necessary that we should find some place where we can remain an hour or two in perfect quiet and talk over our position. We shall have to consider most carefully what is to be the nature of our future movements."

"On, then!" exclaimed Tom King. "Lead the way! Let there be no more delay, for every moment is of value."

This was true enough.

A little time had been consumed by this conference, but it could not by any means be said that time had been lost.

Indeed, the brief halt had enabled the horses to recover their wind to a very considerable extent, and now, after this temporary rest, they seemed to set forward with fresh vigour.

The speed made for some time was all that the highwaymen could desire.

Their way lay across a succession of smooth meadows, the turf in which was particularly grateful to the horses' feet.

Dick's comrades were by no means surprised that he should manifest so strong a desire to return to the old ruins.

Not a word had been breathed respecting Maud, but yet all knew that it was Dick's strong impression that she was in the vicinity of the castle, which made him so anxious to return.

At any rate, the step which they had taken seemed, so far as they could tell at present, a wise one.

The officers appeared to be completely baffled.

By this time the daylight had much increased in intensity, and in the east could be perceived a ruddy glow that proclaimed the speedy rising of the sun.

As our friends happened to ascend some rising ground they were able, by looking back when they had gained the summit, to command a very extensive view of the country around them.

Hill and dale, river and stream, bush and tree, were all revealed with a clearness and brilliancy that was delightful to contemplate.

In vain, however, did our friends strain their eyes in the endeavour to catch sight of their pursuers.

At some distance several men could be seen in the act of crossing a ploughed field; doubtless they were on the way to the scene of their daily labours, but these were the only human beings the highwaymen were able to discern after the longest and closest scrutiny.

"All's well," said Dick, at last, though his voice proclaimed that in truth all was not well with him. "Forward once more, my comrades; the ruins cannot be far distant now."

"Do not forget that we are on the look-out for a place of shelter," observed Tom King. "It is true, we have been singularly fortunate at present, but then we are running a very serious amount of risk by riding thus by daylight."

"I am well aware of that," answered Turpin, "and it shall continue no longer than we can possibly help."

After this the highwaymen rode on for a considerable distance in perfect silence.

Each one, indeed, was busy with his thoughts.

At last they found before them a pretty narrow lane—one of those places that are so charming in the glorious summer time, either at sunset or sunrise.

"We will go a little way up and down this lane," said Turpin, after a brief consideration. "If we do not succeed in finding any shelter near, we shall, at least, have reconnoitred well, and made sure that none of our enemies are lurking near, so that, any way, the step is well worth taking."

From this his comrades did not for one moment think of dissenting.

The hedge dividing them from this lane was a low one, so that it was easily overleaped.

Tom King then went to the right, and Sixteen-String Jack to the left.

The other two waited for their return.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to appear.

The expression of his countenance showed that he had made some welcome discovery.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Dick Turpin.

"There is an inn a little below here," he said—"a capital place, and one that would suit us exactly, I should think."

"Is it retired?"

"Very. About the most sleepy-looking place you could imagine, I should think. It looks as though never more than one traveller a week stopped there."

"That is the place for us, then. Is it in this lane?"

"Well, scarcely; for about a quarter of a mile below here, the lane, after a sudden turn, emerges into a cross-road, and this inn stands just at the corner."

"Wait a moment, then, I can hear Tom King coming. Let us hear what news he brings."

In a few seconds afterwards Tom made his appearance.

"There is nothing to be seen that way," he said; "the lane goes winding on for I don't know how far, and the further you go the more unfrequented it looks."

"Then you have not seen any one, Tom?"

"Not a soul."

"Then, Jack, we will bend our way to this inn you speak of."

The next moment the little party was in motion.

It took them but a brief space of time indeed, and on their arrival they found that Sixteen-String Jack's description had been a very good one.

The noise of their arrival brought a fat, sleepy-looking individual to the door.

This they conjectured was the landlord.

It would seem as though he had only recently risen, for it cost him quite an effort to keep his eyes open sufficiently wide to observe our party.

"Going to stop here, gentlemen?" he asked, perceiving that they were drawing rein.

"Yes."

The reply evidently took him by surprise.

He had expected a negative, for such a large party as that to stop at his door for refreshment was quite an unparalleled circumstance.

But the realisation of this fact produced a wonderful effect upon him.

His eyes opened wide at once, and remained so without any trouble while he bawled aloud:

"Robin—Robin! You idle skulk! Robin, I say! This way!"

In response to these words another sleepy-looking personage came upon the scene.

This was the ostler and general factotum upon the establishment.

"Coming, master!" he growled, lazily. "Coming—coming! Oh, my eye!"

The last exclamation was wrung from him by the unexpected sight at the front door.

"Never mind your eye," said the landlord, who had overheard the ejaculation, "but just attend to these gentlemen's horses."

In the meantime Dick and his friends had dismounted.

Just as the ostler took charge of the horses, Dick said:

"I suppose, landlord, you can find us accommodation for an hour or two?"

"Oh yes, sir, the best—the very best, I assure you!"

"That is all right, then. But the fact is, you see, we

have made a very long and tiring journey. We did hope to have accomplished the whole of it without making any halt whatever, but one of our horses met with an accident, you understand."

Dick made this remark in order to account for Tom Davis being unprovided with a steed.

The landlord appeared to be perfectly satisfied, and, with a great deal of obsequious ceremony, ushered them into a decently-furnished room.

Dick looked around him with satisfaction.

"The accommodation will suit us very well," he said, "provided you like to agree to one condition."

"And what may that be, sir?"

"Why, that during our stay here we have this apartment entirely to ourselves; we should not like the intrusion of a stranger. Of course," he added, "we don't want to have a private room without paying for it accordingly."

"Lor' bless you, sir! Why, you need not have any fear upon those grounds. Why, I shall think business is very brisk if I see one more traveller between now and this day week."

Our friends heard this declaration with an amount of satisfaction which they could scarcely conceal.

A good meal was then ordered as a preliminary, and during its preparation Tom King strolled about the premises and peeped into the stables with the air of a listless idler.

This, in fact, is what anyone would have taken him to be by his movements.

It would have proved a very great mistake, however, for Tom was busily engaged in making himself familiar with the whole of the premises, so as to know just what to do and where to go in case of an alarm.

Situated as the highwaymen were, the reader cannot fail to see that this was a very necessary precaution indeed.

While thus engaged, the ostler crossed the yard, carrying under his arm a quantity of corn, which he had just received from the landlord.

He touched his hat respectfully to Tom, as he said:

"Perhaps, sir, you would like to see the horses have their corn."

Tom assented eagerly, being only too anxious to embrace any such opportunity as this for the reason above stated.

There was only just sufficient accommodation for the horses, but Tom King had the satisfaction of seeing each manger well filled with corn.

After a few casual, unimportant remarks, he withdrew.

"Is all well at the back?" asked Dick, as soon as he entered the room they had engaged and closed the door after him.

"Yes; we seem to have tumbled into capital quarters. I have seen the horses fed. Each one has a mangerful of corn."

"Then they will do very well."

Just after this, the meal they had ordered was brought in, but before sitting down to it, Turpin rose upon some slight pretext and quitted the room.

He was anxious to see for himself that all was as well as his comrade had reported.

He was absent only a few moments.

As soon as the landlord had retired and they were once more alone, Tom said:

"You found all right, did you not?"

"Yes. But did not you say you saw each horse well supplied with corn?"

"Certainly I did."

"Then they must have eaten it with amazing quickness, for now every manger is quite empty."

Tom looked incredulous.

"It is doubtless some roguesy on the part of the ostler," continued Dick. "I have often suspected that some such trick as this was played. Of course, it is impossible that the animals can have eaten such a large quantity of food in so brief a space of time."

"Well, just wait till we have finished this," said Tom King, alluding to the meal they had before them. "I will go out again then and try to find out the trick, for some trick there is I am quite convinced."

"And after that," said Turpin, sadly—"after that—"

"We will hold a consultation," interrupted Tom; "and if we all lay our heads together you may depend we

shall hit upon the course of action that will be the best for us to pursue."

"Let us discuss this first," said Claude Duval. "My appetite is prodigious, and this is the first comfortable meal I have sat down to for a very long time."

By common consent, all consultation as to their future actions was postponed, while the whole of their attention was paid to the good things before them.

No sooner, however, was the meal over than Tom King made his way to the stables, upon pretence of seeing that the horses had been supplied with water.

He was so fortunate as to enter unseen by the ostler, who just then happened to be engaged indoors.

Tom was considerably puzzled to know how the corn had been disposed of so suddenly and completely, for the mangers were positively bare.

The horses looked hungry and discontented, having nothing to satisfy themselves with besides some not over sweet hay in a rack above.

Tom, however, happening to look very closely, perceived that at one extremity of the manger a small bag was fitted, so placed and so contrived that a great quantity of corn could be swept into it in a moment, which, falling to the bottom of the bag, was of course quite out of the horses' reach.

Having made this curious discovery, Tom scarcely knew what to do.

However, he determined to return and confer with Dick before taking any decisive step.

The ostler being still absent, Tom quitted the stable without any of the occupants of the inn being aware of his visit to it.

He quickly communicated his discovery to Dick, who, of course, was much incensed.

"I don't believe the landlord is to blame," said Tom. "It's the villanous ostler. By adopting this little expedient you may depend he makes a capital addition to his wages."

"Come along with me," said Dick—"I have an idea. You will see what it is in a moment without my taking the trouble to describe it to you."

With these words the whole of the party repaired to the yard.

No sooner did Dick cross the threshold than he gave that signal which always had the effect of bringing Black Bess to his side.

The stable door was open, but Bess was confined by a halter.

One sudden snatch, however, enabled her to break the rope, and she at once trotted out into the yard, to the great astonishment of the landlord and the ostler, who both came out into the yard.

"Hilloa!" said Dick, as soon as he caught sight of his mare. "So there's some roguery here, is there!"

"Roguery!" gasped the landlord.

"Yes," answered Dick; "this mare of mine is a very sagacious and intelligent animal, and whenever she meets with any ill usage she always contrives to let me know of it."

"Ill usage?" ejaculated the landlord and the ostler in one breath.

"Yes; and by the way of her I don't believe she has had any corn given to her. She is hungry—that is what's the matter."

The landlord looked inquiringly at the ostler.

The ostler at once appealed to Tom King.

"Why, sir," he said, "did not you see me carry the corn through the yard, and did not you see me fill every one of the mangers?"

"I did," answered Tom, "and therefore I cannot help thinking my friend is mistaken."

"Of course he's mistaken!" cried the ostler, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"We shall soon see," said Dick, carelessly, and advancing a few paces while he spoke, so that he could place his hand on his mare's neck.

"See?" ejaculated the landlord. "How can you see? I hope you'll be careful in what you are saying! Don't you try to take away the good name of my house?"

"Well," said Dick, with the same affectation of carelessness, "I shall just ask my mare the question, and shall be satisfied with her reply."

"With her what?"

"Her reply."

The ostler grinned.

"You don't mean to tell me that your horse can speak, do you?" cried the landlord.

"You shall see and judge for your selves," answered Dick. "Just wait a moment."

With these words he put his mouth close to his mare's ear, and pretended to ask some question in a faint whisper.

Having done so, he touched her upon the flank, and the immediate effect of this was to cause Black Bess to turn her head round so that her mouth was close to her master's ear.

The effect was just the same as if the creature had really spoken.

"Just what I thought," said Dick, looking up, and encountering the wondering countenances of the landlord and the ostler. "My mare declares that she has not had more than one mouthful of the corn that my friend over there put into her manger."

The ostler laughed very loudly, but he was not at his ease for all that—indeed, he felt decidedly uncomfortable.

The landlord looked at the matter in a serious light.

CHAPTER MXXII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS MEET WITH A SURPRISE AT THE INN.

"I don't know, gentlemen," he said, "what may be the meaning of this little farce—for so I cannot help calling it—but, understand, you have not a fool to deal with. And I won't suffer the good name of my inn to be taken away with impunity! Do you mean to try to impose upon me with the tale that a horse can speak?"

"I have said it," answered Dick, "and, if you don't believe, I will give you a proof."

"A proof?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"Why, by my mare."

"I don't understand you!"

"Then I will quickly make my meaning clear. I am going to ask my mare what became of the corn that my friend saw put in the manger, and rely upon it she will tell me the truth about it."

At this the landlord looked incredulous and impatient—

The ostler uneasy and confused.

As before, Dick made a great pretence of whispering to Black Bess, and afterwards, in the same manner as before, she placed her mouth to his ear.

Dick nodded his head as though he had received a communication of a very satisfactory nature indeed.

"Well, sir?" asked the landlord, haughtily.

"I am glad to say that all doubt and suspicion will now be at an end."

"How so?"

"Because my mare has given me a proof of her former assertion."

"May I ask what it is?" said the landlord, more stiffly than before.

"Oh, certainly! My mare tells me that fixed at the end of her manger is a bag, into which all the corn was swept by the ostler as soon as my friend's back was turned, and the other horses were served just in the same way."

"And," said the landlord, staggering back a little, "do you mean to look me in the face and say that your mare told you that?"

"You don't believe it, then?"

"We—well, I—I—"

"Your hesitation is quite sufficient. You need not trouble yourself to utter the denial which is trembling on your lips."

"I—I—"

"Enough! I will give you the proof which fortunately is in my power. Stop your ostler from entering the stable, and then come in with me yourself, and then, if you do not find the bags just as I have described them, you are welcome to persevere in your disbelief. If you like, I will lay you two hundred guineas against two that all I have told you is neither more nor less than the truth."

The positive tone in which Dick spoke—

The anxiety which the ostler manifested to rush into the stable first—

And, above all, Dick's offer to stake so large an amount made so deep an impression upon the landlord that he began to waver in his disbelief and credit that a horse could speak.

"If there is any such contrivance as you say," the landlord managed to say at last, "I beg to assure you it is altogether against my knowledge. I would not wittingly allow such a dishonest practice to be followed on my premises."

"I don't say that you know anything of it," cried Turpin, quickly—"in fact, I firmly believe that you are guiltless of all complicity in the deed."

"Thank you for that, sir! I have always taken the utmost care that all should be square and straightforward. As you saw, I do not allow the horse corn to be kept in the stable, but serve it out in the house as wanted."

"Let us have a look," said Dick—"that is the best way to satisfy ourselves. If the bags are not there, I will never believe a word my mare says again."

Leaving Black Bess's side, Dick took hold of the landlord's arm, and led him into the stable.

They walked at once into the stall that had been occupied by Black Bess, because that was the only one that was vacant.

Full of curiosity and amazement, the landlord approached, and quickly discovered that what he had been so strangely informed of was perfectly correct.

The proper end of the manger had then been removed, and at this place the bag had been affixed.

A sweep or two with the hand was then all that was required to empty the contents of the manger.

In fact upon further examination, it was found that this bag contained the whole of the corn.

No one could have been more surprised at this discovery than the landlord was.

Dick at once, and for ever, exonerated him from any share in the petty theft.

"Confound the rascal!" the landlord cried, after having examined all the other mangers and found them fitted with a similar appliance. "Confound him! I can understand how it is that my trade has dropped off so much lately. But wait till I catch him, that's all! I'll be even with him, I'll warrant!"

With these words the landlord rushed hastily out of the stable into the yard with the full intention of visiting condign punishment upon the ostler.

But that individual, finding that his cheat had been discovered, took care to make himself scarce, for he was nowhere to be found.

For some moments the landlord's transport of rage continued.

Then it suddenly abated.

His eyes fell upon Black Bess, who was still standing quietly in the yard.

He gazed at her with a stare of so ludicrous a character that all the highwaymen were forced to laugh.

But the landlord neither saw nor heard them.

All his faculties were centred upon Black Bess.

With hesitating steps he ventured to approach her, but stopped short when some few paces distant, and gazed again with a look full of mute amazement.

He was evidently fully impressed with the belief that Black Bess was gifted with the powers of speech—that he had really, for the first time in his life, looked upon the surprising and unheard-of phenomenon—a talking horse.

He peeped at her inquisitively everywhere, as though anxious thoroughly to imprint her image upon his mind.

At length he turned towards Dick, who was so amazed at the scene that he felt he could have continued to gaze much longer without tiring.

"Sir," he said, "this surprises me very much. It does indeed! I can't reckon it up at all—no, not a bit! I never in my born life heard of a horse telling tales—never! Can you give me another proof of her powers in this way?"

Dick gravely shook his head.

The landlord looked deeply disappointed.

"At least," he said, "you will tell me how it was you came by her—how it was you found out that she could talk?"

Now this was a difficulty which Dick had not at all taken into consideration.

He felt he had been somewhat indiscreet thus to call such public attention to his mare.

It would have been most easy for him to have declined to answer these impertinent questions of the landlord, but, then, Dick felt it would be far better to allay his curiosity, if possible; otherwise, if permitted to exert itself without restraint, it might pass all bounds.

The highwaymen wished to stay for a few hours—say during daylight—and be perfectly undisturbed the while.

Now, if the landlord was not satisfied in some way, the secret would burn in his breast to such a degree that he would be obliged to ease himself by telling the whole account to some one.

All these considerations presented themselves to Dick in a moment, but he could not so readily or so quickly hit upon the means of doing what he wished.

He therefore affected to hesitate, but in reality it was only to gain a little time in order to think.

The landlord renewed his entreaties, and at length, as if suffering himself to be overpowered by them, Dick led him to one side with a very mysterious aspect, and then said, in a solemn whisper:

"I am going to tell you something which will have the effect of placing my life in your power. Don't start, but listen."

The landlord did listen, with his eyes so staring that they actually seemed as though about to start from his head.

"Many years ago," said Dick Turpin, in the same mysterious and solemn tones, "I devoted myself very closely to the black arts, and made such progress in magic, that I learned the secret of metempsychosis. Do you know what that is?"

The landlord professed his entire ignorance of so abstruse a subject.

"Then," said Dick, speaking if possibly with additional solemnity, "I must inform you that metempsychosis means the art of possessing the power to change the form of living creatures—that is to say, to change a cat to a rabbit, or a rabbit to a wolf, and so forth."

The landlord's jaw dropped.

"I made many experiments, by which I fully demonstrated that I possessed the power; and now I can go no further unless you swear solemnly never to divulge to a living soul what has taken place. Do you swear?"

"I do."

"That's enough. Now, do not start! Don't be incredulous. But you see that mare yonder?"

"I do."

"Then that is my wife."

"Your what?" ejaculated the landlord, fairly staggering back.

"My wife."

"That—that—"

"Yes. Or, rather, I should have said, she was my wife until I practised my art upon her."

"Met—met—"

"Metempsychosis."

"Ah! that's it," said the landlord, drawing a breath of relief and wiping the drops of perspiration from his brow.

"Now, that is all."

"But—but—"

"But what?"

"You have not told me what were your motives for transforming your wife into a horse."

"Oh, I will tell you that."

"Ah, do!"

"She was a dreadful scold."

"Yes—yes."

"So dreadful, that I never knew what it was to have a moment's peace of my life. I tried everything I could think of. In vain. Indeed, I began to think that she grew more and more a vixen every day, so that at last, in sheer self-defence, I was compelled to practise my art upon her."

"And you succeeded!" gasped the landlord.

"Behold the result?"

Dick Turpin pointed to Black Bess as he spoke.

The landlord could not remove his eyes.

Dick Turpin hardly thought the landlord would be credulous enough to swallow so monstrous an invention as this.



[THE DEAD BODY IS CARRIED TO THE INN.]

At his astonishment every word was implicitly believed.

"It's amazing," the landlord at last managed to utter—
"truly amazing! But, sir—sir——"
"What now?"

The landlord came closer to Dick, with his face wearing a most mysterious aspect.

He looked cautiously around him in order to make sure that no one was near.

Then he took hold of Dick by the lapel of his coat, and in a whisper he said again:

"Sir—sir!"

"Well, what now?"

"Such a secret as you say you possess must be worth a very great deal to one who—who——"

"Who what?"

"Who happened to be troubled with a scolding wife, as you were, sir."

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"No doubt. You see, she was before the plague of my life; now I have turned her to the best account. She is invaluable."

"But yet you did not stop her tongue," said the landlord, grinning.

"How so?"

"Why she tells tales now."

"But she can only speak in a whisper," said Dick, who was slightly taken aback by the last remark, "and I am not unless I speak to her first, so you see that is an advantage rather than otherwise."

"Decidedly. But now, sir——"

The landlord's mysteriousness increased.

Dick felt curious, for he could not imagine what the man was driving at. There was evidently something trembling on the tip of his tongue to which he hesitated to give utterance.

"Pray speak," he said. "Do not be afraid."

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"Well, then," began the landlord, after a second apprehensive glance round the yard and particularly towards the house, "you must know that I am at the present time afflicted in the same way that you say you were."

"With a scolding wife?"

"Yes; but however bad yours may have been, I make bold to affirm than mine is ten times worse."

"Impossible!"

"But I got not a second's rest night or day; I live like a toad under a harrow."

"So did I."

"Then, sir, as you know what it is like," said the landlord, beseechingly, "have pity upon me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Why, be kind enough to exercise your art upon her."

"Transform her?"

"Yes. I should then be ever your debtor—I should indeed, believe me. You must know that by an accident I have recently lost the very best horse in my stable. Trade is so bad that I cannot afford to buy another to take his place. My wife I could well spare, and therefore if you would only—"

Dick now found himself in another dilemma.

But his ready invention quickly helped him out of it.

"Do you know," he said, "that if what we have been talking about was to come to the ears of a third person it would cost us our lives?"

"Yes, yes—I know that."

"We should be hung, drawn, quartered, and afterwards burnt if we were known to have plotted anything of the kind against a fellow-creature."

"Yes, yes—I know that too. But excuse me, sir, you ran the risk, and I am quite willing to do so."

Dick saw that the landlord's anxiety to get rid of his scolding wife made him credulous to the utmost degree.

No imposition would be too gross for him to swallow.

"I consent," he said, as it appeared, after a few moments' reflection—"I consent, out of the fellow feeling I have for you; but upon condition that one stipulation is scrupulously observed by you—"

"Yes—yes. Anything—anything!"

"In order for my spells to work, time must be had. I have many things to prepare, and you must yourself go through a preliminary course."

"Eh? How?"

"Why, for nine days you must eat nothing but bread, and drink nothing but water. Do you promise to observe this faithfully?"

"I do," answered the landlord, who, as his appearance denoted, was strongly addicted to the good things of this life, therefore he pronounced the words somewhat unwillingly.

"In the next place, not a syllable must be mentioned about what you have seen to-day, nor respecting your intentions. Lastly, but not by any means the least in importance," continued Dick, laying his hand upon the landlord's shoulder, "money must be provided, in order that the necessary preliminaries can be carried out fully and properly."

"How much will be required?"

"Well, of course you cannot expect me to take all this trouble for nothing; besides, it is worth something to possess such a secret, and it cannot be made use of unless well paid for."

"How—how—much?" asked the landlord, breathless now with impatience and anxiety.

"Why, to commence with, I shall want fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds?"

"Exactly. That you must pay down to me before the business can be carried any further."

"And how much afterwards?"

"Are you in the mind to find the first fifty?"

"Well, you see, sir, my wife is a miser—a regular miser, and that's the long and the short of it. I can never get hold of any money; but she has plenty."

"How shall you manage?"

"Why, it happens most providentially. But this very morning, sir, as true as I stand here, I discovered one of my wife's secret receptacles for money, and I should say there is as nearly fifty pounds there as can be."

"That will be the very thing then. She little thought

for what purpose she was saving up her money, did she?"

"No, no—I'll warrant not."

"Well, then, this fifty pounds must be placed in my hands at the earliest moment possible, and the rest—"

"Yes—yes, the rest—"

"That will be fifty pounds more you must bring on the ninth night from this to the ruins of the old castle close by here."

"You mean Comynge Castle?"

"I do."

The landlord's teeth chattered with fear.

"I have heard frightful stories about that place," he said—"yes, truly frightful stories."

"Disregard them. You must meet me there in the courtyard; at the hour of midnight I shall be with you."

"Midnight?"

"I have said it."

Clearly, the landlord did not relish the concluding portion of the adventure, but doubtless he considered he had now gone too far to retract.

"I—I will be there."

"Give me your hand, then."

A mutual grasp followed, and then Dick, after many more injunctions about secrecy, and particularly bidding him to bring the money at once, he accompanied him to the house.

Dick's comrades followed.

As soon as they had entered the room, and the door was closed, they everyone indulged in a hearty but yet by no means noisy laugh.

Dick held up his hand for silence.

"Oh, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack, in whose eyes the tears caused by his suppressed laughter were standing, "I will give you credit for ingenuity, though I could never have believed that any man would have been such a gudgeon as to swallow so monstrous an invention."

"Nor I," said Dick, "only I discovered his intense gullibility as I went on."

"Do you think he will bring the fifty pounds?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"And shall you meet him at the ruins?"

"That I can't tell at present."

"I only hope," said Tom King, "that he will not be fool enough to leak out anything; if he does, there will be so much curiosity raised that our recognition must inevitably follow; then who can say what trouble will ensue?"

"I don't think there is much need for apprehension. We will keep a sharp watch upon everything that goes forward."

"And we shall only stay here till dusk, I suppose?" said Claude Duval.

"Not a moment later. And now things having been so far settled, let us occupy the rest of the time in deciding upon our future movements," answered Turpin.

At this moment there was a faint tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Dick.

The landlord entered, carrying in his hand a well-filled leather bag, which he placed in Dick's hand.

"I have performed my part of the contract so far," he said, significantly, "and I fancy that ought to be sufficient proof of my sincerity."

He pointed to the bag as he spoke.

"I have no doubt of it," answered the highwayman, as he very contentedly consigned the money to his pocket; "and if you are only careful to be discreet all will be well."

"Depend upon me."

"I will. But understand, the least disclosure—the slightest allusion to what is going to take place, and we shall both be ruined in this world and the next."

The landlord made so many protestations of his determination to preserve strict secrecy that it would be tedious to repeat them.

Much pleased with the prospect of getting rid of his scolding wife, he left Dick and his companions to themselves, though not until the former had impressed upon him the importance of being at the ruins at the appointed hour.

"Now, my comrades," said Dick, "let us dismiss this fellow from our minds. Perhaps it is as well that we have had this little incident to divert our attention."

now we must devote ourselves to more serious business. I want you to view our position in every possible way, and to assist me to come to a determination, for I never felt less able to rely upon my judgment in my life."

"You may depend that we shall do our best," said Tom King; "but still, for all that, Dick, I consider you are the proper person to speak first in the affair."

CHAPTER MXXIII.

EVENTS OCCUR AT THE INN WHICH CAUSE DICK TURPIN TO ALTER HIS ARRANGEMENTS.

"SINCE you will have it so," began Dick, "I can only say that my chief anxiety is to discover what has become of Maud."

"Yes, certainly—that is the first step," assented Tom King.

"It is still my impression," continued Turpin, "that, despite our unsuccessful efforts to discover her, both she and Jack the Ostler have been pounced upon suddenly by the officers, made prisoners, and carried away."

"This must be ascertained," said Sixteen-String Jack—"there must be no doubt about it; and should things turn out as you imagine, she must be rescued."

"Or I die," said Dick, with earnest emphasis.

"And so say all."

Dick was much gratified by the ready response from his comrades; it was a proof of that oft-made assertion that they would if requisite die to serve him.

"Then, now," he continued, "let us think which would be the best and likeliest way for us to gather the information we require. I confess, for my own part, that the likeliest course seems to hover about the ruins, which I believe might be done without the risk of much danger."

In this opinion his comrades coincided.

"You are forgetting me," said Tom Davis, who had been waiting for an opportunity to speak. "I can see very plainly that I am a very great clog upon all your movements, and that I shall be the means of materially increasing your danger."

"I cannot deny that," said Turpin; "still, the evil, such as it is, cannot be avoided, therefore must be endured."

"I do not agree with you."

"Very likely; but you need not imagine that we shall show ourselves so ungrateful for what you have done for our behalf as to abandon you now to your enemies."

"It would be no abandonment," answered Davis.

"But it would."

"Nay, listen. Do not you think that the landlord's credulity could be turned still further to account?"

There was a general laugh at this question, and Dick asked:

"How?—in what way?"

"Why, could you not induce him to give me safe shelter for a few days? I could easily meet you when and where you liked to appoint; and I should think the threat of the disclosure of his plot against his wife would be sufficient to overawe him should he prove refractory."

"We will discuss that further presently," said Dick. "The idea is not a bad one; but, first of all, we will——"

He paused abruptly.

His comrades started rapidly to their feet.

The deep and sleepy silence which had hitherto prevailed around them was now broken in upon by sounds which were precisely of such a character as to excite apprehension in the breasts of our friends—

The hoarse murmur of many voices—

The heavy trampling of many feet.

"That means danger," said Claude, as he hastily seized his pistols.

Dick held up his hand.

"Silence!" he said. "Do not let us be too hasty. Approach the window with me and reconnoitre; but take care that you are not seen by anyone without."

This sensible suggestion was immediately complied with.

Peeping cautiously through the panes, the highwaymen caught sight of a large crowd of persons approaching

They were all on foot

Amidst them seemed to be some object which attracted all their interest.

Dick and his comrades gave a sigh of relief.

The new-comers were not police officers, though a constable and a beadle could be distinguished among the throng.

As they came nearer, it was perceptible that those persons occupying the centre of the crowd were engaged in carrying some heavy object.

What it was our friends had no means of telling.

The very moment, however, that Dick discovered what these people were about, he experienced a sensation such as one might imagine to be produced by the pressure of an icy-cold hand upon the heart.

His cheeks blanched, and he leaned forward without daring to breathe, for now his mind was occupied by a worse foreboding than he had hitherto entertained.

The procession, if such we may term it, came steadily along the road.

It was approaching the inn, and by the glances given and motions made by the beadle and the constable, it would seem as though this was to be their destination.

We cannot possibly describe with what intension and anxiety all the highwaymen watched the movements of the throng.

All seemed to feel that it was in some way connected with them and with their fortunes.

At length the door of the inn was reached, and then all doubts as to the destination of these persons was set at rest.

They stopped, and the beadle spoke for a few moments with the landlord, who, no less full of curiosity than our friends, stood upon the threshold.

What it was the beadle said the highwaymen could not overhear, but it was certainly assented to by the landlord.

They could tell that by his gestures.

The beadle raised his long gilt-crowned staff, and cried, in a loud, authoritative voice:

"Now, then, you who are carrying the body, this way! Keep quiet—no rushing! Only the bearers will be allowed to enter the inn. Mr. Samuels, please stand by that doorpost, and between us we shall be able to keep the rabble back."

The person thus addressed was the parish constable, and he took up the required position without a moment's hesitation.

A great deal of dissatisfaction was, however, created among the crowd by this order, but the two officials stood firm.

The crowd of people, being thus forbidden to enter, clustered thickly round the door—so thickly, that none of our friends were able to obtain a single glimpse of what was carried by so many men.

From the beadle's words, they knew it to be a body; but without this it could have been guessed by the expression upon the countenances of the crowd.

There was a hurried trampling of heavy footsteps in the passage outside—the same continued upon the staircase, then a heavy lumbering overhead, and finally comparative silence.

Those five persons in whose fortunes we are so much interested stood and stared blankly at each other.

But Dick Turpin was the one who was most overcome. His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, while the manner in which his features quivered was painful to behold.

Pain would they all have hastened to the room above, whither the body had been carried, and by one glance have satisfied the terrible doubts which assailed their hearts.

But the fear of recognition held them back, for it could scarcely happen that among so many persons the appearance of our friends was unknown.

The risk was one too great to be run.

"It is strange," said Tom King, breaking the oppressive silence, and speaking with a palpable effort—"very strange that this incident should have had such an overpowering effect upon us."

"I—I—would give much for one glance at the body."

Dick did not speak.

"Let us call the landlord," suggested Sixteen-String Jack. "There is a bell here by which we could summon him."

Dick held up his hands.

"This suspense and uncertainty is painful—very pain

ful to all of you, but especially to me; but I feel that our wisest course is to remain quiet a little longer, and endure it as best we can. In a short time these people will doubtless leave the inn. Let us keep out of sight till then. If we make no movement, the landlord may, in the excitement of this fresh arrival, forget all about us, and so these others will be quite ignorant of our presence here."

Dick spoke firmly and quietly.

His companions listened intently to every word, and, when he had finished, unanimously signified their belief that the course proposed was the best that could be adopted.

But to no wretched criminal awaiting the pronouncement of his doom did time lag so fearfully as it did on this occasion to Dick Turpin and his comrades.

It seemed as though the curiosity of the crowd outside would never abate.

There was a complete Babel of sounds.

Fruitlessly did the highwaymen endeavour to make out a few distinct words from the mass of gabble.

More than once they felt as though their patience must give way.

At last the constable, beadle, and those who had carried the body left the inn.

Some who were outside followed them.

Others indulged themselves with a longer and more minute inspection of the building before they finally took their departure.

Shortly after, according to Dick's anticipation, the landlord knocked at the door.

Now that the moment had arrived when all their doubts would be resolved, Dick Turpin became quite unnerved.

He was too agitated to pronounce the words, "Come in!"

The landlord, however, did not wait for this, but opened the door.

His face was full of mystery and importance.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a deprecating bow, and rubbing his hands together as he spoke, "I hope you have not wanted for anything, and that you will pardon my neglect, but—but—"

"What has all this commotion been about?" asked Tom King, speaking with tolerable steadiness. "I thought you told us this inn was such a quiet place?"

"Gentlemen," said the landlord, uplifting his hands to give additional assurance to what he said, "I assure you this is such a thing as has never happened at this inn since I have been the landlord of it, and that's a good many years, I can assure you. Why, you see, it's quite, as I may say, a history—yes, quite a history."

"But come to the point at once."

"I am sure I don't know how, for, you see——"

"What was it those people brought in?"

"A body."

"A dead body?"

"Yes, a corpse."

"Of—of—wh——"

"Ah," cried the landlord, interrupting him, "that's what nobody knows?"

The highwaymen repeated the words in extreme astonishment.

"A perfect stranger, gentlemen—a perfect stranger."

"But cannot you tell us," cried Dick Turpin, in a voice of the utmost agitation, for this suspense was to him the most acute of tortures—"cannot you tell us whether it is a man or ——"

The landlord gazed at Dick aghast, and well he might.

His eyes were gleaming, his lips trembling, and the cold dew of apprehension was on his forehead.

Well might the landlord be surprised at the manifestation of so much anxiety.

"Why," he said, "it's a man—of course it's a man! I thought that you knew that. But, bless us and save us, what's amiss?"

A fervent "Thank Heaven!" burst from Dick Turpin's lips.

Then he was himself again.

The trouble that had weighed him down seemed to have rolled away as a mist suddenly rolls upon the sides of a mountain.

The reader has no doubt interpreted his terrible fear aright.

He was not unreasonably under the dread that the body was that of Mar. d.

He fancied in some way she must have met with her death—and what was more probable? for the reader knows already how near was the occurrence of that catastrophe—and that her body, having been found, was carried to the inn, there to await a judicial inquisition.

But now that fear was completely dissipated.

The shock, however, was almost too much for endurance, for he flattered himself with the idea that he had prepared himself for the worst.

"What man?" asked Claude Duval, for the landlord, having spoken, stood stock still, gazing upon Dick, whose extreme emotion seemed to have raised a dim kind of suspicion in his breast.

Claude had to repeat his question before it was responded to.

Then, with a start, the landlord said:

"I beg your pardon, sir, ten thousand times—I do indeed; but really, what with one thing and the other, I really don't know, as the saying is, whether I stand upon my head or my heels, or whether I am myself or not."

The landlord did indeed seem greatly flustered, and it would have been a great wonder if he had been otherwise.

Wiping the perspiration from his forehead, he sank into a chair, and ejaculated:

"Gentlemen, if you will allow me I will try to give you an account of this affair from the beginning to the end. You will understand it better and so shall I, for I am so flabbergasted, in a manner of speaking, that I scarcely at present comprehend the rights of it myself."

"Sit down, then, and begin. Tell the tale after your own fashion."

The highwaymen felt that now their minds were so much relieved that they could endure any amount of prolixity upon the landlord's part.

"It appears, then," he began, "that early this morning, as a cowboy was going along a cross road not far from here, he saw what he thought was a man asleep under a tree. As he came nearer, however, he saw that the animal he was in search of was bending its head down on the prostrate form, while a dense swarm of flies and insects filled the surrounding air."

"So it was a dead man?"

"Yes, that was what it was found to be. The boy was frightened out of his wits almost, and ran along the road as if the devil was after him, nor did he stop until he met with some men who were on their way to work. To them he communicated his discovery, and they all went back in a body."

"And then the corpse was brought here?"

"Yes, sir," said the landlord, rather annoyed to find his narrative thus interrupted. "The constable was fetched, and so was the beadle. The body was examined and found to be that of a perfect stranger. Many looked at him, but none could remember having seen a man of his appearance in the neighbourhood."

"And what was the cause of death?"

"Ah, that is to come."

"Well, proceed."

"The beadle was the first who dared to have a good look at this man's face. I don't wonder that the others shrunk from it, for it is an awful sight, such as I hope I may never see again!"

The landlord shuddered while he spoke.

"Go on—go on!" cried Dick.

"It is most frightfully disfigured, so much so, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish one feature from another. They seem to be clarified with fire. The plain fact is the man must have been struck by a thunderbolt in that fearful storm; the tree itself under which he was found is, I am told, terribly shattered."

"Then by that and your description," said Turpin, "there can be little doubt that he met with his death by a stroke of lightning."

"He has been brought here, I suppose, in order that an inquest might be held?" observed Tom King, who had hitherto listened in deep thought, and who now broke the silence which followed Dick's last words.

"Yes, sir, that is it."

"Where is he now?"

"Upstairs."

"In the room over this, I think?"

"Yes."

"Is there anyone with him?"

"No, the door is locked."
 "Where is the key?"
 "In my pocket."
 "Then," said Tom, bringing his series of questions to a close, "I have a very great desire to have one look upon this body."
 "But—but——"
 "What objection have you?"
 "The sight is dreadful!"
 "You said so."
 "I dare not look upon it again!"
 "You need not. Show us up. You need not so much as cross the threshold. We will leave you at the door."
 "Yes," said Turpin, rising, for he fancied he knew what was passing in Tom King's mind, "I have this desire quite as strongly as my friend has—so, landlord, show us up at once."
 "But I had particular orders from the beadle and the constable on no account to allow anyone to enter the room unless they were present, and if I disobey the injunction, why, I shall get myself into serious trouble."
 "Nothing of the kind," said Dick. "Who is to learn anything about it, I should like to know? We shall never mention it, and surely you would not be fool enough to do so?"

CHAPTER MXXIV.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN DETERMINE THE NATURE OF THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

"WELL, I can't say that I should," answered the landlord, with a smile at Turpin's brusqueness.

"Then let us have no more words about it. Show the way upstairs."

The landlord did not like to refuse Dick anything, so great was the dread and respect he felt for the powers which he supposed him to possess.

Rising then from his seat, he advanced to the door, bidding our friends follow him.

They needed no second bidding.

Knowing what has happened, the reader, beyond all doubt, guesses accurately at the identity of the dead stranger.

A dim suspicion of who it might be was floating in the minds of all the highwaymen.

It was most important that this suspicion should be resolved.

Treading in the landlord's steps, they ascended the staircase and paused before a door.

A key was inserted into the lock.

"Enter, gentlemen," the landlord cried, "and be quick out again. As for myself, I have seen the horrid sight once too often already."

The highwaymen, of course, did not press him to accompany them.

Indeed, they were glad that he manifested a disinclination to be present, lest, in the event of their suspicions being correct, he should observe some alteration in their demeanour and so begin to suspect them.

The dead body had not been laid upon a bed, but upon a table formed by placing several planks upon some trestles.

A white sheet concealed the relics of humanity from view, but it had been cast over long enough to have settled down close to the form, so there would have been no difficulty in making out the nature of the object that lay there so calm and still.

It was Dick Turpin who took hold of one corner of the sheet and removed the covering from the face of the corpse.

A sensation of unutterable loathing came over him.

Conquering the feeling, however, he turned down the sheet still more.

The moment their eyes fell upon the apparel they recognised it.

It was well, indeed, that the landlord was at hand to look upon Dick Turpin's countenance at this juncture. It fully expressed the dreadful agitation of his mind.

Several minutes were passed, during which all continued to gaze at the stark and inanimate form before them, and so might some time more had they not been aroused by the voice of the landlord.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "if you have seen enough,

let us be going. I am afraid every moment that the beadle and constable will be here."

Without the utterance of a syllable, the sheet was replaced, and the little party betook themselves to the room below.

"Well, gentlemen, what think you of it?"

It was the landlord who asked the question.

"The sight is an awful one."

This was all they would say in reference to the subject.

So soon as ever they were alone they drew close together and waited for the captain to address them.

"I scarcely know what to make of this discovery," he said, in grave tones. "Let me hear what is your opinion of it?"

"I can give you my views in a very few words," said Tom King.

"Then do so."

"I consider that your belief about Maud's capture in the ruins is quite erroneous."

"You have entertained that opinion all along, have you not?"

"I have, and now it is an opinion no longer."

"What then?"

"A conviction."

"You think that——"

"Patience, and I will tell you. Depend upon it, Maud and Jack the Ostler were aware in good time of the approach of the officers. They then hastily made their retreat."

Dick was not convinced.

"Remember," Tom King continued, "I once had an excellent sample of Jack's cleverness in dealing with police officers, and that makes me fancy that he would neither be surprised easily nor yield readily. Let us suppose that he was aware of the presence of the officers in good time, then what would be the most likely thing for him to do?"

"Beat a retreat."

"Of course, and take Maud with him. They would immediately seek safety in flight, and would also leave the ruins, beyond doubt with the intention of meeting us and warning us of our danger."

The reader knows, of course, how very closely Tom's supposition approached the truth.

Dick could not fail to see the plausibility of it, and yet he was only half convinced.

"You think," he remarked, after a brief pause, "that they left together, took shelter under the tree together to escape the violence of the storm, and that Jack the Ostler perished?"

"I do, and that by great good fortune Maud escaped."

Dick shook his head.

"It is still as easy to believe, and quite as probable, that Jack escaped alone. If they had both been under the tree together one could scarcely have perished and the other escaped."

Tom could not gainsay this; but he observed:

"At any rate, this discovery will cause some alteration in our plans as heretofore decided upon. I think the first thing we ought to do is to find out the particular tree, and make a close search in its vicinity. Who knows but what we may light upon some trace of Maud?"

Dick smiled sadly.

"It may seem strange—nay, foolish to cling with such persistency to what is after all no more than an idea; still, I must confess that my original impression remains almost unshaken."

"At any rate," said Claude, "we will go first to this tree before we come to any absolute decision."

"Yes," said Turpin, "I think it would be best."

"Then let us call in our friend, the landlord!" cried Sixteen-String Jack; "he will be able to describe to us tolerably well whereabouts the tree is."

"Very good."

The landlord accordingly was summoned and questioned.

He was easily able to direct them.

"If you will go along this lane," he said, "instead of going out upon the high-road, and if you will keep on until you come to an inn, and then go past that inn almost as far as it is from here to it, you will see the tree on the right-hand side; it is a magnificent, wide-spread—

ing oak. You cannot fail to find it, because I am told it is quite rifted by the lightning."

"Stop a bit," said Claude.

"What is it?" asked the landlord, turning to him.

"It appears from your account that there is an inn nearer to the scene of the catastrophe than this?"

"Yes, of course there is—the Jolly Tar."

"Then why was not the body carried in there, and the inquest held upon it in that place?"

"Ah!" said the landlord, in reply, "thereby hangs a tale, as I heard a man say in a play once."

"Be quick; let us have it, then."

"Well, I must begin by telling you that the Jolly Tar has had rather a queer name for a long time past. Persons have been heard of entering its doors, but never passing out of them again."

Dick nodded.

"Well, I have just heard that there was truth in these reports; a body of police have found out all about it. The place is a regular murder den, and the landlord and landlady are by this time safe in jail."

"So the place is shut up, I suppose?"

"Yes; and that was the reason why the body was not carried in there."

This was all the intelligence of any importance that they were able to obtain.

It did not interest them very much, for they little guessed how close a connection that closed-up inn had with Maud's fortunes, and how narrow was the escape she had of losing her life there.

Little did they imagine that they were so very close upon her track.

There was no chance, however, that they would be enlightened as to the true facts of the case.

Indeed, the probability was that in their unhappy mental blindness, they would recede from instead of approach the object they were so anxious to attain.

At length this long and weary day—for so it was to our friends, in spite of the strange incidents with which it was diversified—wore away.

The welcome shades of twilight came creeping over all things.

So soon as they deemed it prudent, they took their departure.

So far as they could, not the faintest suspicion as to their identity existed.

The landlord assisted them to prepare the horses for the road.

Just as he was on the point of riding away, Dick Turpin turned round, and said, solemnly:

"Remember our compact and the appointed hour. Do not fail; I shall be there."

Leaving these words to have their due effect upon the credulous landlord, Dick Turpin hurried off.

It was easy enough to find the road, they knew; but as soon as a turn of the lane concealed them from the landlord's view, Dick said:

"I am glad we obtained the information concerning this Jolly Tar Inn. Ten to one some police officers are still there, for in such cases the premises are rarely left, so that if we rode by we should stand a very good chance of being recognised."

"Right, captain," said Claude. "I was wondering whether you would think about that. I should propose that we take to the fields at once, and make a considerable detour—in fact, approach the tree from precisely the opposite direction to this."

A unanimous consent was given to this proposal, and the next moment they were all making their way at a rapid rate across the open meadows.

In this manner they were able to keep altogether out of sight of the Jolly Tar Inn, so that they avoided all possible danger of detection in that quarter.

At length Dick changed his course, for he saw before him something that looked like a human habitation.

Shortly afterwards he emerged into a lane—that very lane down which Maud had ridden at such a fearful speed in company with Hunch.

They looked about them, however, without for a moment suspecting anything of the sort.

All was calm and quiet, and accordingly they ventured to approach the tree.

They reached it undisturbed.

Now that the lightning had struck it, this tree was

indeed a strange-looking object, and would for the future form an unmistakable and easily-recognised landmark.

Dismounting, they made a close search around, but the result of it did not prove at all successful.

There was no trace of Maud—

Nothing whatever to point, however distantly, to the fact that she had stood side by side with Jack the Ostler beneath its branches.

Tom King was the last to give up the search.

He was compelled to own that his expectations were not realised.

Dick, of course, was only the more confirmed in his opinion.

As the spot seemed silent and retired, the highwaymen chose it as their place of conference.

Long and anxious was the discussion which ensued.

Eventually, their future movements were decided upon.

It was agreed that a separation should take place.

Tom Davis, feeling how great a clog he was upon the movements of the highwaymen, was most anxious to be left behind.

But it was considered that the presence of police officers at the Jolly Tar, and, above all, the fact that an inquest was about to be held at the inn they had left, made it most unsafe and dangerous for him to linger in that neighbourhood.

"No," said Dick Turpin, "you shall, Tom, if you have no objection, come with me, and I will at the earliest moment either provide you with a place that holds out some slight prospect of safety, or else obtain you a horse."

"And I," said Tom King, "feeling sure that my opinion is the true one, will do my best to get upon Maud's track."

"And we," said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, "will work together to the same end."

"Agreed," said Turpin. "My course, as you know, lies in the direction of the ruined castle."

"Be careful, captain, for there is much danger there."

"Trust me—I will be careful."

"And now," said Claude Duval, "when we have decided upon our meeting place, I think we may venture to part company without any more discussion."

"Let this be the place," said Dick Turpin, "or somewhere near it."

"Agreed. And the time, when?"

"Between midnight and dawn."

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And if we can none of us keep the appointment, then it will hold good for the next night."

"Enough."

"We part, then. Farewell."

A few more words were exchanged, and then the highwaymen separated according to their arrangement.

Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval were the last to leave the spot.

The reason for this was, that they wished to allow Tom King to choose his own course.

As soon as they observed in what direction he rode off they departed in just the opposite.

There was chance alone to direct them, and it so happened that this led them far away from that water-mill where certainly some tidings of Maud would have been gained.

The country around was remarkably desolate.

There were few trees around, and no vestige whatever of human habitations.

Still Claude and Jack rode on for some distance, but at length, upon a word from the former, they arrested their horses' steps.

"I am afraid, Jack, that we, at least, are upon the wrong track."

"So do I. I should imagine Maud would not go very far on foot, and certainly would have no reason to per sever in this direction."

"I think not."

"Shall we turn back, then?"

"And try another way?"

"Yes."

"I don't know," was the reply. "Suppose, before giving a reply, we go on a few miles further?"

"Agreed."

"The nature of our surroundings may then be considerably altered."

"True."

"Forward, then."

Once more the highwaymen set their steeds in motion. Ere they had advanced many steps, however, they were startled by hearing the sound of hasty footsteps.

The next moment a man came into view.

He was on foot, and running at the very top of his speed.

So excited did he seem, that he appeared altogether unconscious that horses were on the road before him, which happening to be narrow about that part, there was every probability that he would come into violent contact with them.

At the very last moment he beheld our friends, and stopped himself abruptly.

For a moment it seemed as though he was about to turn round and endeavour to force a hasty passage through the quick-set hedge with which the road was bounded.

But if this had been his intention it was immediately abandoned.

A great change came over him.

With one bound he placed himself in front of Claude and Jack, and then, in the accents of indescribable fear, he cried:

"Gentlemen—gentlemen, in the name of common humanity I call upon you to protect me! Save me—oh, save me! Gentlemen, save me—save me!"

There was something so extraordinary and withal so ludicrous in the appearance of this new-comer, that the two highwaymen, instead of responding to his appeal, sat stock still upon their horses, regarding him fixedly.

While they are thus engaged we will take the opportunity of describing in a few words the nature of this man's exterior.

He was about the middle age, and somewhat inclined to be corpulent.

His attire was that of a tolerably well-to-do London tradesman, but it was now in a terrible condition.

His coat had been split up the back, so that it hung behind him in two most extraordinary-looking tails.

The rest of his clothing was torn in many places and literally belastered with mud, looking as though in his headlong race he had tumbled down, and then had rolled over and over in some mysterious way until he had rolled himself on to his feet again.

His hat and wig were both gone, and his bald, shining pate added not a little to the ridiculousness of his appearance.

"My good man," said Claude Duval at length, "what is the matter, and what do you want me to save you from? So far as I can tell, we are the only people near this spot."

The stranger was so exhausted, and so scant of breath, that he could not immediately make a reply.

Puffing and blowing like a grampus, he cast apprehensive glances around him.

"They are coming after me," he gasped at length—"I am pursued, but, luckily, I have out-distanced them a little. Hark! can you hear?"

Our friends listened intently, but no sound whatever came upon their ears.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Jack. "By whom are you pursued? I can hear no one."

"Ah, gentlemen," said the man, "you have no idea what I have gone through during these last two days and nights—no idea whatever! Ah me! and when I tell folks, I shall be disbelieved and laughed at, I know I shall. Ah!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow while he spoke, and seated himself on a long stone that happened to be close to the hedge-bank on one side of the road.

"I do believe," he continued, "that I am in a fair way of making my escape. If I could only rest a little, gentlemen, and recover my wind and strength a little, I should doubtless get away altogether. But I dare not stop here unless you will be so kind as to remain and protect me if they come."

"They?" echoed Claude. "Who do you mean by they, and what have you done that you should be pursued?"

"Done?"

"Yes, done."

"Nothing, gentlemen—nothing at all!"

"Then why are you pursued?"

"That would take some time to tell; but while I am resting here for a few moments I will, if you like to listen, make you acquainted with the most extraordinary concurrence of circumstances you ever heard of! Ah!"

This interjection is to represent the peculiar kind of sigh with which this singular personage concluded every sentence.

The curiosity of Claude and Jack was greatly roused, and therefore they at once desired their singular companion to speak freely.

"I am glad of that," he ejaculated, immediately upon receiving their permission—"very glad indeed, for do you know that I am so perplexed and bewildered by the many events which have occurred, that a narration such as I am about to make will materially assist me to comprehend them."

"Be speedy, then," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for we are engaged upon business of importance and cannot afford to stay long."

"Ah, me! Well, I am a tradesman from London—a respectable tradesman. My shop is at the corner of Bucklersbury. Perhaps you may know it, gentlemen."

The highwaymen shook their heads.

"It don't matter," continued the stranger. "You will have to take my word for more than that. However, it is a fact. Mine is one of the largest establishments, and I deal only in the very best silks, velvets, and such like."

Some little impatience was manifested by the highwaymen at this detail.

The stranger, however, went on.

"Lately I have had a very constant, and as I believed, excellent customer—quite a lady she appeared to be, and she bought many of my things and paid a good price for them. Who she was I neither knew nor cared, but I learned that she kept a first-class house in a fashionable street, and lived in first-class style. Don't think I am going about the bush too much. I am not indeed. Oblige me by listening, gentlemen, for I assure you the strange part of my story is to come, and you will admit that you never heard anything so monstrous. Ah!"

CHAPTER MXXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL FOLLOW UP THEIR ODD ADVENTURE.

UPON receiving this intimation, our friends prepared themselves to listen more attentively, and the stranger continued, in a rapid voice:

"Two days ago I received a letter from an unknown correspondent, warning me that a suspicious character had been frequenting my shop of late, and that she no doubt intended to make a victim of me."

"Unfortunately, the writer of the letter was not sufficiently explicit."

"I was thinking over this, and endeavouring to remember all the different people who had been in the shop lately, when the lady I have mentioned to you drove up to the door in her carriage."

"I went myself, opened the door, and assisted her to alight, and this completely drove out of my head all recollection of the letter."

"You will not wonder at this when I tell you that the lady was in a very gracious humour. She told me she wanted to make some very extensive purchases in silks and velvets. Nothing that I put before her was too good or too dear in price, and I began to think, as one roll after another was bought, that I was going to do a capital day's work."

"This lady, I presume," said Sixteen-String Jack, "was the cause of all your troubles?"

"She was. But you shall hear. Have the patience to listen to me for a few moments longer."

Jack promised, and the stranger continued his narrative:

"At last she told me she had bought all that she required. She asked for the bill. It was made out in due course. The amount was just over two hundred pounds."

"She put her hand into her pocket, and then exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, I have not enough with me to pay you."

"She looked awkward and confused for a moment, and I suppose so did I, for I did not like to offend such a good customer; and just then the recollection of the warning letter flashed with unpleasant vividness upon my mind. I resolved to be careful.

"After a moment's reflection, the lady seemed to recollect herself.

"It is very annoying," she exclaimed, with a smile, "and I don't know how I could be so careless; however, I have been thinking that, after all, it will be for the best!"

"I expressed my satisfaction.

"Yes," she continued, "I am now very glad I thought of it. You must know that I have an aunt staying with me at my house a little way out of town, and I am certain she wants to make some similar purchases to mine, though not to so great an extent. What I am going to propose to you is that you should get into the carriage and ride home with me. On our arrival, I will give you the money; and in order that your journey may not be lost, you can take some other things in the carriage with you for my aunt to select from."

"Now, gentlemen, I appeal to you—did you ever hear anything more reasonable, or straightforward, or proper than that? I ask you before I go any further."

"Nothing," said Claude. "But what that has to do with your running away I really don't know."

"But you will see in a moment, sir. Delighted and overjoyed with the prospect of doing so large and excellent a stroke of business, I selected silks and velvets that I thought likely to suit to the value of between two and three hundred pounds more. The whole was placed inside the carriage, and the lady would insist upon my entering with her, though I refused for a long time, and declared my resolution of sitting beside the driver on the box.

"Eventually, however, she overruled me. The carriage was entered, and away we went.

"Now, I left the shop in such a hurry that I never went behind to speak to my wife and tell her where I was going; but just as I passed out I told the assistant in the shop that I should be back in three hours at the most.

"Ah, gentlemen, now for my misfortunes. You will ask why I have troubled you with all these trade details, but it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with them in order for you to understand what follows.

"I confess I never enjoyed a ride so much in my life, though now I shall look back to it with feelings of anything but pleasure. The lady proved herself to be a most entertaining companion, and laughed and chatted on the way in the most affable manner you can conceive.

"London was left behind, and the country gained. I looked about me with pleasure, for, like most inhabitants of cities, I was delighted with the sight of a green field.

"Well, we rode on and on a long way into the country; I knew that, although the time passed so agreeably and so quickly.

"At last we came to a very high and long red brick wall, such as may be often seen surrounding a gentleman's estate. This one appeared to be of unusual height and strength, for at frequent intervals it was supported on the outer side by stout buttresses.

"The carriage here sensibly slackened pace, and therefore I imagined we had reached our destination.

"I was about to ask the question, but was saved the trouble, for just then the carriage stopped before some large, massive wooden doors set in the wall, and corresponding well with it.

"The stoppage was only momentary, however.

"The gates were opened.

"The carriage rolled through them, and immediately afterwards I found that we were traversing a broad, well-kept avenue.

"I was now quite elate and quite satisfied of the rank and position of my customer.

"I was wondering what extra price I should put upon the goods, when the carriage stopped again.

"This time, it was in the front of the house.

"The carriage-door was opened, and I officiously stepped out in order to assist the lady to alight.

"She rewarded me with a smile.

"I was about to remove the piles of velvet and silk, but she said, sweetly:

"Never mind, I will send for them. Please to enter with me."

"Just then, the front door was opened.

"I followed the lady up the flight of steps and crossed the threshold.

"The door was immediately closed, and the first thing that struck me was the obscurity of the entrance.

"It struck me as being very great, for, having just come from the glare of sunshine without, I could scarcely see who was standing before me.

"But the voice and manner of my companion altered suddenly.

"So great was the change that I could scarcely believe the evidence of my ears, which were the only organs of sense I could make use of, my eyes being, as I told you, of very little service.

"The lady seemed to be weeping, and her voice was that of one enduring the utmost affliction, as she said:

"Alas, sir, you see I am here."

"Yes, madam. Is this the person you spoke to me about yesterday?"

"It is, sir. This is my truly unfortunate husband. Oh, sir, what shall I do?"

"Husband!"

"Gentlemen, I can assure you my backbone opened and shut just then, for all the world like a great clasp-knife.

"Husband! I could scarcely believe I was in possession of my senses.

"Pray, my dear madam," said the same voice which had before spoken—"pray be calm; any agitation on your part may be productive of the worst consequences—the very worst."

"What on earth were they talking about? I asked myself. What did it all mean?"

"But I could not manage to pronounce a syllable aloud, I was so entirely flabbergasted.

"I stood there like a stock-fish.

"Oh, his delusion is now most painful," continued my strange companion. "I had to get him here by pretext; but all the way he has declared I am not his wife—that he does not know me—that his wife is at home in the parlour behind the shop in Bucklersbury; and then he babbles about velvets and silks."

"Such hallucinations, my dear madam, I am sorry to say," answered the soothing voice, "are far from being uncommon. However, you may depend that all that lies in my power—"

"Yes—yes, I know you will do everything you can; but, oh, it is so very, very dreadful!"

"Gentlemen, I can't describe to you what an actress she was.

"Even I felt in doubt once or twice.

"A little reflection soon brought me to myself.

"I had a dim idea of the nature of my situation.

"I resolved to be calm, and to give quietly an explanation.

"Sir," I said, addressing the man with the suasive voice, "I beg to assure you that I have been brought here under false pretences. This is no wife of mine, I assure you, but—"

"At this point the lady flattered her handkerchief and became deeply affected.

"Yes, yes, my dear sir, we know all about it. Come, come, be calm and reasonable. Let me assure you this will be all for your good."

"Oh, oh," sobbed the lady, "I cannot bear this trying scene any longer! Good-bye, my dear husband, I hope you will soon be better—pray be calm, for my sake. Good-day, doctor!"

"Good-day doctor the devil!" I roared, unable to restrain myself any longer. Stop her—stop that woman! Don't let her go. Murder! Stop her, I say. There's all my velvet and silk in the carriage; five hundred pounds' worth at the least. Oh—oh! I see it all now. It's a swindle—a swindle! I understand the letter now. Help—help! Will none of you stop her?"

"At the first word I darted forward, and endeavoured to put a stop to her departure.

"But in a second, I felt many strong hands upon me.

"I was held quite powerless.

"What aggravated me most, however, was the soothing manner adopted by the doctor.



[TOM KING ENTERS THE JOLLY TAR INN.]

"My dear—dear sir, he said, most beseechingly, 'do pray be calm! You cannot imagine what injury you are doing your case by being thus violent. You will much retard your recovery if you persevere in such behaviour.'

"Recovery!' I cried, my voice rising in spite of all my efforts to restrain it. 'Let me assure you there is nothing the matter with me. Feel my pulse—feel my pulse, I say, and you will find me as hale and as sane as any man in the kingdom.'

"The doctor carried the soothing system out perfectly. He did not for a moment refuse my request, but, with an appearance of interest and earnestness that raised fallacious hopes in my brain, pressed his fingers over my pulse.

"He waited a moment, then very gravely shook his head.

"I am very sorry—very sorry to find your pulse so No. 217.—BLACK BESS.

exalted. The danger is imminent. I would not have answered for the consequences if he had been allowed to remain one day more at large—I would not indeed.'

"These last words were spoken in a lower key, and not addressed to me, but to the vile wretch who had so speciously decoyed me to this place, but they reached my ears as well.

"I suppose I can do nothing for him?"

"Nothing whatever—leave all to me.'

"I will. I am most anxious to depart, for the scene is more than I can bear.'

"Stop her!" I yelled again. 'Listen to me, all of you—listen, I say. My wife, I tell you, is at home, sitting in the parlour behind the shop. If you don't like to believe me, keep us both here while you send some one to see Can I say fairer than this?"

"The sympathetic but incredulous smile upon the doctor's countenance aggravated me to such a degree

that I felt as though I should like to rush upon him and tell him to the earth.

"But I was too tightly held for that.

"My dear—dear sir," he said, smiling still. "Let me entreat you—let me implore you to drive this unfortunate hallucination from your mind, for such it is. If you thus persist in it, you will be in great danger of becoming permanently insane."

"D—n you for a grinning, batter-brained fool!" I yelled, unable to control myself any longer. "I tell you I am being robbed—robbed in the most barefaced manner over near of. It's a swindle—an awful swindle; I can see it all now! This is a private lunatic asylum, is it not?"

"The doctor assented with a bow and another of his d—nably aggravating smiles.

"I know it—I know it; I comprehend the whole plan now. Seize her, I say—I give her in charge. Take her into custody. She is a swindler. Do you hear me?"

"I was heard, certainly, but no attention whatever was paid to my words.

"The viper appeared to be more and more affected every moment, and the doctor at length led her to the door.

"It was opened.

"I saw them both descend the steps that led down to the graveled avenue.

"I saw the doctor hand her into the carriage and close the door after her.

"A few more words were exchanged, the order given to the coachman to proceed, and away rolled the carriage, with the thief and my five hundred pounds' worth of property in it.

"My fury, then, I must admit was ungovernable.

"But, gentlemen, I appeal to you. Does it stand to reason that any man could stand quietly by and see his wealth carried away from him in such a fashion?"

"So frantic were my struggles that I almost broke away from my captors, strong as they were.

"But the door was closed, more keepers were summoned, and I was finally overpowered, for my tremendous efforts greatly exhausted me.

"You will be surprised, perhaps, but, gentlemen, I can assure you I burst into tears.

"Five hundred pounds is a very serious loss to me, especially at the present time, when many of my most important ventures have turned out unfortunately.

"There—there, he will be better now, poor man," said the doctor. "Carry him to one of the dark cells, and be sure you are sparing with his diet. I will send the barber to him before long."

"These words acted upon me like the contact of fire with gunpowder.

"All my angry passions broke out afresh.

"Another furious struggle commenced.

"I see—I see," the doctor ejaculated, "leniency will not do in this case—compassionateness is thrown away altogether! Drag him away; clap a strait waistcoat on him, and let him remain for twelve hours in the dark."

"In spite of all my efforts to prevent it, this barbarous purpose was carried into effect.

"I was confined in that atrocious instrument of torture called a strait waistcoat, and in this helpless condition was carried through several passages and down various flights of stone steps.

"A door was opened, and I was roughly thrust into a kind of cellar that smelt for all the world like a grave.

"The door was closed again, and I found myself surrounded by the deepest darkness you can conceive—in fact, I never knew before what was expressed and meant by the word darkness.

"There I was allowed to remain, as I suppose, for the time specified. I had no means of noting the flight of time.

"No sound whatever penetrated to that dark and gloomy place.

"How I passed those hours I can scarcely describe to you; certainly you can form no conception of them yourselves. I wept, prayed, raged all by turns until compelled to cease from sheer exhaustion.

"I now fully comprehended by what a clever and well-planned scheme I had been defrauded of my goods.

"Nothing more ingenious I had ever heard of.

"What puzzled me most was to know whether the

people at this asylum were in league with the adventurers.

"Such a thing was far from improbable; but then, on the other hand, I could see how very easy it would be for her to impose upon and make dupes of them.

"My property was gone—of that there was no doubt—and I endeavoured, with what philosophy I could command, to reconcile myself to my loss. This I found a difficult and almost impossible task.

"I was determined that I would in the morning be as calm and quiet as it was possible for any human being to be, for I could see that was the only chance I should have of regaining my freedom—unless, indeed, it was all a planned job to keep me there.

"I suffered a fever of apprehension on account of my wife, who would, I knew, be tormenting herself to death on my behalf.

"At last I heard the welcome sound caused by the removal of the fastenings of the door.

"I sat quite still.

"Several keepers entered.

"He's quiet enough now," said one, in a low tone. "We'll venture to take the waistcoat off him. If he's obstreperous we can soon master him again."

"While he spoke, this man very ostentatiously flourished and cracked a huge, heavy cart whip.

"A sympathetic shudder thrilled me.

"I sat as still as a statue while I was unbound.

CHAPTER MXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK CONTINUE THEIR SEARCH FOR MAUD.

THE interest with which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack listened to this interesting narrative was so great that they manifested great impatience while the poor man paused a moment or so for breath.

"I suffered myself to be led to an upper chamber," he continued, "and when there I was told to sit down in a chair that was placed near the centre of the flooring."

"I obeyed.

"No sooner did I seat myself, however, than, with great suddenness, several springs started forth and held me fast.

"One confined me across the chest, another clasped my legs, and so on, while two others held my head in such a manner that I could not move it in any direction in the least degree.

"I wondered what was coming next.

"I was not kept very long in suspense.

"The door opened, and in stalked the doctor, who was followed by another individual wearing a white cap and a white apron.

"I guessed their purpose at once, and a cold sweat burst out all over me.

"But I was as powerless as I should have been had I by some magical power been suddenly converted into stone.

"How is the patient?" asked the doctor.

"Uncommon quiet," answered the keeper.

"The doctor shook his head, and again felt my pulse.

"Oh, how I wished that one limb was at liberty. What intense delight it would have given me to have felled him to the earth!"

"But there I was, as I have described to you, unable to move a muscle.

"His pulse is still very high," said the doctor, with the utmost gravity, "and therefore we may safely conclude that this present unusual calmness of demeanour is only assumed, and that immediately upon recovering his liberty he would resort to deeds of violence. This is a very severe case, and I shall have to use unremitting care to bring about a cure."

"I cannot give you an idea, gentlemen, of how much these words galled me.

"My indignation was something I cannot describe, and I feel pretty sure that had I at that moment been released from my fastenings I should have perpetrated some rash act or other.

"But I was not allowed the opportunity.

"He must be reduced," said the doctor, "and every

means tried to get him really quiet. First of all, barber, we will cool his brain.'

"I knew very well what this meant.

"My tongue, which I had contrived to keep still all this time, would be restrained no longer.

"I broke out into a furious burst of angry invective—I reviled the doctor and his associates—declared what I would do to them if I only had the opportunity, and repeatedly averred that I was not mad.

"All listened with a pitying smile, which went far to increase my fury.

"However, there I was, more helpless even than a newborn babe—they could do with my person just whatever they thought fit.

"Gentlemen," continued the unfortunate tradesman, "you see my head—it was lately covered with hair, of which my wife was so fond that she would not let me wear a peruke, according to the fashion of the times. Well, while I sat there in that abominable chair, one of the keepers, with some huge bright scissors, snipped it off close to my head, and then the barber finished the horrid work with his razor; in less than a moment my head was as smooth as the back of my hand.

"I was so grieved over my loss that I positively wept.

"Here was an accumulation of one misfortune after another.

"I began to dread that the upshot of all this would be that I should go mad in reality.

"My fury again became ungovernable, for it required a greater amount of self-command than I possessed to think over such wrongs as mine unmoved.

"Ah, well," said the doctor, who had been watching me, "I see it is a desperate case, and we may as well do all we can for him at once; it will be a saving of time and trouble in the long run."

"While he spoke, he took a lancet from his pocket.

"I looked at the little glittering instrument with the utmost apprehension.

"My arms were tightly bound down to my sides by means of the strait waistcoat; but I discovered that there was an opening left in this by which my arms could be punctured without being removed from restraint.

"This the doctor at once proceeded to do. The incision was made, and I watched the outpour of the blood until I grew sick, faint, and giddy.

"That will do," I heard the doctor say at last, though his voice seemed to me to sound as though it came from miles and miles off. "Release him, and carry him back to the dark room; you will find him tame when you visit him next time."

"He was right, for when I aroused myself from the state of dreamy torpor into which the loss of blood had thrown me I was so fearfully weak that I could hardly raise my head from the hard mattress on which I had been thrown.

"How long I remained thus I know not, for in that dismal place it was, as I have told you, impossible to keep any note of time—not even the ordinary distinction of night from day could be observed.

"At length my tormentors made their appearance.

"One carried a small basin containing some delectated nutriment; this was placed to my lips, and I swallowed it half unconsciously.

"I quickly experienced the benefit of it.

"I was pronounced to be by no means so dangerous as I was. The fellows declared that the mad light, as they called it, had gone out of my eyes.

"Then afterwards the doctor came.

"He, too, declared me better, and allowed the strait waistcoat to be removed, and also had me conveyed to another chamber.

"As soon as I was left alone here I began to give myself up to serious thought.

"An end must be put to the present state of things somehow—I felt that keenly; if not, I should, beyond all doubt, eventually become quite mad.

"I began to see that nothing but the greatest hypocrisy would save me.

"My loss I now began to bear with greater patience.

"It was severe certainly, but then it was not irretrievable.

"My anger always rose, however, when my thoughts

dwelt upon the villainous woman who had so cruelly duped, robbed, and deceived me.

"I promised myself that when I recovered my freedom no effort should be wanting on my part to bring about her capture.

"I fancied, however, that if I humoured the doctor's notions, and no longer persisted in a denial of what he held to be facts, that I should be set at liberty.

"Therefore I resolved to dissemble.

"The next time the doctor saw me, I looked at him without any of that fierceness of aspect with which I had hitherto invariably regarded him.

"He noticed the change at once.

"Ah!" he said, rubbing his hands briskly, 'how are we now?'

"How am I?' I said, passing my hand over my forehead. 'Has there been anything the matter with me? I have been trying to make out where I am and how I came here until my brain is in a whirl.'

"Hush—hush!" said the doctor. 'Be calm—pray be calm! In good time you will know all. At present you cannot keep yourself too quiet.'

"A few more words were exchanged between us, and then the doctor left, promising to send me a draught that would put me right, and assuring me that after I had partaken of it I should leave for my own home.

"Yes," I said, 'Bucklersbury, No. 97. Alas! what will not my wife have suffered during my inexplicable absence? That villainous wretch—'

"I stopped myself, for I saw the doctor's eye was upon me.

"I had forgotten my caution, and felt ready to bite the end of my tongue off.

"I could see then that the doctor did not believe in my restoration to sanity—that I was, with the cunning for which lunatics are celebrated, deceiving him by a false calmness in order to regain my liberty.

"He did not say a word of all this, but quietly backed out of the room.

"As soon as he was gone, I sprang to my feet, for I was no longer under any species of personal restraint, and was considered to be so far better as to have a light and cheerful apartment allotted to me.

"I felt that now or never was the time for me to make my escape; and if I did not succeed, there was no knowing how long my stay in that place might be protracted.

"It was already growing dusk, so I considered all things favourable for my design.

"I rushed to the window.

"This was protected by iron bars.

"Anxiety and excitement lent me a strength such as I had never dreamt of possessing.

"One bar was partially removed from its place, and I at once set to work to force myself through the narrow opening thus made.

"I received many injuries in the attempt, but I persevered, for I considered this to be my only chance of success.

"My hands were lacerated, my clothes torn, and my flesh terribly bruised, but, heedless of these minor evils, I persevered with my task.

"At last I got through, and dropped a considerable distance to the ground.

"Fortunately, I alighted upon some soft mould in a garden.

"I was stunned by the fall, but soon recovered myself.

"I found that, beyond a good shaking, I had not sustained any injury.

"Rushing along, I made my way to the boundary wall which I have before mentioned.

"My heart now sunk within me, for how was I to surmount such an obstacle?

"My spirits revived again directly afterwards, for at some little distance I perceived a man standing on a ladder that was leaning against the wall.

"I crouched down to observe his movements.

"I was not long before I found that he was engaged in studding the top of the wall with numberless pieces of broken glass, doubtless with a view to prevent such an escape as I was now contemplating.

"The question now arose of how I was to pass him on the ladder. I was afraid that I should be hurled to the ground—that an alarm would be raised and that I should be recaptured.

"Luckily, I recollected that he would be compelled ere long to descend for more materials, and just as I thought of it he began to come down.

"I now held my breath with anxious anticipation, for I was determined, at all risks, that as soon as his feet touched the ground I would bound forward, ascend the ladder, and drop myself from the opposite side.

"The man reached the ground.

"He stooped down to supply himself with more materials for his work.

"With a sudden dash I reached the foot of the ladder, and then ascended it with more speed than I felt convinced a ladder had ever been ascended with before.

"Ere the man could recover himself from his state of surprise, or even comprehend what had taken place, I had reached the top.

"He bawled frantically to me to stop.

"But I disregarded him, for just then I had fairly gained the wall.

"For a moment I sat astride it.

"I seized the ladder with both hands, and threw it down.

"The man had to step back to escape injury, and I felt certain that I had prevented him from following me so speedily as he would have done.

"But a general alarm had now been raised.

"My escape so far had been discovered, and they were organising a pursuit.

"I looked down on the outer side of the wall with a feeling of great misgiving.

"However, I could not hesitate, having succeeded so far.

"I lowered myself as well as I was able till I hung down at the extreme length of my arms, and let go.

"I reached the hard road with great force, but I was on my feet again in a moment.

"I knew at once which way would take me towards London, so I ran with all my might; but before I had gone far I could tell that the doctor and his crew were on my track.

"This circumstance, so far from causing me to despair, only made me double my speed, and when I found that I was actually distancing them I made increased exertions.

"Now, gentlemen, I have done, for it was soon after this that I was so fortunate as to meet with you. And let me thank you for having patience to listen to so long a narrative."

"But I hear nothing of your pursuers," said Claude Duval; "and besides, if they were so close after you as you describe, they must have reached this spot ere now."

"They must have abandoned the chase. Perhaps I have distressed myself with running without absolute occasion. At any rate, my best thanks are yours."

"You are welcome," said Claude. "And, what is more, should we encounter any of your pursuers, we will send them upon a wrong track."

"Thanks again! And if ever you call at 97, Bucklersbury, you will find Simon Pursall will make you welcome."

"It is the most extraordinary narrative I ever listened to," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"It is indeed, gentlemen. I knew you would say that."

"Farewell!" cried Claude. "We have stayed here too long already, for we have much important business to attend to."

They rode off as he spoke, scarcely giving the man time to utter the word farewell.

"What do you think of that adventure, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, when they had got to a little distance.

"Why, that it was about the oddest we have ever encountered."

"So I think; but my chief concern is to know whether the man has been insane or not."

"What is your opinion?"

"I can hardly give one. It may be all true; and if so, he has been badly used, though at the same time the cheat is of a more elaborate description than I have ever before heard of."

"There is a certain amount of probability about it, is there not?"

"Yes, there is; but then I have often heard that mad people are very cunning sometimes in concocting apparently coherent, but yet extraordinary, narratives, such as this we have just listened to."

"We may speculate upon it till doomsday, I expect, without coming much nearer to a conclusion."

"Yes, and therefore we may as well give it up at once and turn our attention to the business we have in hand."

They rode on for some distance in silence, but at length Jack said:

"We are getting too far away, Claude, I feel convinced we are. Let us retrace our steps and start off upon a fresh track."

"With all my heart."

"I have been trying to think what would become of Maud."

"So have I."

"With what success?"

"None. Have you?"

"I have not. If she was with Jack the Ostler under that tree when it was struck with lightning, I cannot conceive how he could perish and she escape."

"It baffles me completely, and I feel like one groping in the dark."

"So do I, and therefore I consider there is but one course open to us."

"And what is that?"

"To leave all to chance. We have nothing better to direct us; and—who knows?—we may by mere accident stumble upon the right track."

"It is possible."

"Come, then, we will get a little nearer to the blighted tree. I feel certain we are taking the wrong course now."

With these words they changed the direction in which they were going.

Scarcely had they turned round, however, and fairly got their horses in motion, before Sixteen-String Jack perceived in advance of him a faint and distant light.

Immediately upon making this discovery he directed the attention of his companion to it and pulled up.

No sooner were the horses at a standstill than Claude exclaimed:

"I can hear wheels now."

"So can I."

All doubt about the character of the light was now at an end.

A vehicle could be heard approaching, though what puzzled the highwaymen was to see only one light, as it was the custom for carriages of almost every description to carry two.

Our friends remained in the middle of the road where they had paused, undecided what to do.

"Come, Claude," said Jack, arousing himself, "what is to be done? If we wait here, the carriage will in a few moments be upon us."

"I think we had better not interfere with it, under the circumstances," said Claude, though he manifestly spoke with great reluctance. "Let us attend first of all to the task we have undertaken."

"Very good," replied Jack, who did not like to say anything in contravention to his companion's expressed decision.

As he spoke he backed his horse close under the shadow of the hedgerow.

"Why are you taking up that position?" asked Claude, in suspense.

"Simply in order that the carriage may pass freely. If you place yourself by my side, those approaching will pass on without having the least suspicion that we are on the road at all."

"Which may be important," said Claude, as he at once backed his steed close to his friend's.

By this time the approaching vehicle was very close at hand indeed—so close, that there was no reason to fear that their patience would be exhausted by much waiting

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL HAS QUITE A CHIVALRIC AND PLEASANT ADVENTURE.

NOT another syllable was spoken, on account of the fear they had that the sound of their voices might be floated

on the still night air to the ears of those who were so rapidly nearing them.

As may be expected, the highwaymen, despite their resolution not to attack the carriage, kept their eyes riveted upon it, for they could not help experiencing a considerable amount of curiosity and interest.

They were soon able to make out that the carriage was a closed ^{one}—something after the fashion of a post-chaise.

But it looked very odd to see a lamp burning at one side of it and not at the other.

The horses that were attached to it seemed of good quality, for they drew it along at a tolerable rate.

This was about all the highwaymen were able to make out.

In another moment, with a sudden rush, the vehicle swept past.

As soon as the rattle of the vehicle had died away a little, Claude exclaimed:

"Hang me, Jack, if I like to remain idle like this, and allow a carriage to go by in that fashion! Follow me! We will overtake and stop it at all hazards!"

Sixteen-String Jack was not very much surprised at this sudden change of his comrade's determination.

Without a single word of dissent—for the proposal exactly accorded with his feelings—he followed his friend.

Their weapons they knew were in perfect readiness.

They now put their horses to the utmost speed they were capable of making, and the manner in which they flew over the ground was something extraordinary.

As the pace they were going at was at the very least double to that made by the vehicle in front, it follows that they overtook it in a very short time indeed, despite the efforts which the driver made upon hearing some one powdering after him at such a rate.

"Hold!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, who happened to be first—"hold, I say! Pull up your horses! If you disobey, I will let daylight into you!"

A chorus of screams came from the interior of the vehicle immediately after the pronunciation of this threat.

The coachman, like a prudent man who places a due value upon his life, tightened the reins, and the panting horses very gladly came to a standstill.

Jack turned round and saw that Claude had made the best use of his time.

He had already gained the door of the carriage, and was looking into the interior.

Perceiving this, Sixteen-String Jack thought he could not be better occupied than by keeping guard over the driver; he resolved to remain in the position he had taken up, and leave the rest to his companion.

Leaving Jack to this piece of duty, we will return to the proceedings of Claude.

The moment he rode up to the window and looked in, he beheld a sight for which he was scarcely prepared.

The carriage contained half a dozen persons; and what was surprising was that they were, without exception, young girls whose ages might be taken at an average of seventeen or eighteen years.

By the manner in which they were attired it could be perceived at once that they belonged to the upper ranks of society.

They were, too, all beautiful, so that Claude was for a moment quite dazzled and overpowered by the sight of so much loveliness.

Our friend's appearance was greeted by a succession of faint screams.

The loudest was uttered by a young lady who held in one hand a lamp, evidently the one that should have been at the side of the carriage.

In her real or affected consternation, she suffered it to slip from her hand.

It would have fallen to the floor of the carriage but for the quickness with which Claude put out his hand and caught it.

This he was able to do easily, for immediately upon finding that he had nothing but ladies to deal with, he had consigned his pistol to the holster of his saddle.

The manner in which he now held the carriage lamp was such as to allow its beams not only to fall upon the very of fair ladies, but also upon himself, for he could

perceive that, despite their real or pretended terror, they were stealing glances at him, and Claude was rather inclined to be vain of his personal appearance.

And, indeed, rarely had he appeared to greater advantage than he did at that very moment.

His countenance was one which even his detractors could not but admit was a most pleasing one, and his dark moustache—then quite an unusual appendage to the face—gave him a decidedly foreign and distinguished look.

Then his eyes were remarkably fine and bright, and as the light of the lamp fell upon them they seemed to glitter almost like diamonds.

Then there was his picturesque-looking hat.

His not less picturesque-looking costume, for his bright scarlet coat and white vest gave him quite a military appearance.

It did not require much penetration to discover that his exterior had made a very favourable impression upon the ladies.

With a smile which was really charming, and which seemed at once to dissipate any apprehension which the ladies may have experienced, he said, with a graceful inclination of the head and many gentle accents:

"Excuse me, fair ladies, for my seeming rudeness, but I little dreamt this road would be enriched with so much loveliness to-night. I cannot bow, I fear, for both my hands are occupied, and yet—"

Even as he spoke he, with a rapid movement, shifted the lamp from his right hand to the left, in which he held the reins.

He found it was able to do this double duty very well.

His right hand was now at liberty, and the first use he made of it was to remove his hat and make a very deep and respectful bow.

Now it is not a very easy thing to bow gracefully on horseback, but Claude managed it to perfection.

Then with a slight shake of his head he caused his dark mass of hair to fall into a profusion of natural curls.

At this time it was no less singular to see a gentleman wearing a moustache than it was to see him with his own hair, for barbarous fashion dictated that nothing but wigs should be worn.

The effect produced upon all the ladies by this was greater than before.

One was so overcome by it that she actually uttered a sigh, which had the effect of bringing Claude's eyes full upon her, and which, of course, threw her into a great deal of confusion.

A rather awkward pause now ensued.

It was broken by the young lady who had held the lamp, and who appeared to be of a more sprightly disposition than the rest.

The manner in which she glanced at Claude while she spoke clearly showed that our adventurer had made quite the reverse of a disagreeable impression upon her.

"Perhaps, sir," she said, with a saucy toss of the head and an air of assumed indifference, "you would be kind enough to let us know why you have interrupted our journey in this threatening manner?"

"Ladies," said Claude, resuming his hat and placing his hand upon his heart, "I beg you will not prove yourself so unkind as to turn a deaf ear to my supplicating apologies. I do indeed most heartily regret that I should have disturbed your journey; but can you wonder if I confess that now I feel rejoiced, for never before have my eyes rested upon such an effulgence of loveliness."

This speech was very favourably received by the ladies to whom it was addressed, and from whose features all appearance of fear had completely faded away.

"It seems very strange," said the one who had first spoken, "that you should stop us thus. May we inquire your motive for doing so?"

"Ahem!" said Claude. "I—I—am a wandering knight."

"A wandering knight?" echoed all the ladies in chorus, and with a manifest accession of interest.

"Yes."

"Oh, how delightful!" said the one who had first spoken, and who appeared to be the youngest of the party. "Why, do you know, I have been reading the most charming book. Here it is: 'Rosalba, or the Wandering Knight.' Pat then, it can't be you—your name is not Rosalba?"

"It is not," said Claude; "but yet I am a wandering knight, as I informed you."

By this time our friend had discovered that he had chanced to fall in with some very romantically-inclined young ladies, and he made a mental determination to bring the adventure to a pleasant termination.

The reason of the lamp being carried inside the carriage was now apparent.

The young ladies had beguiled the tedium of their journey by reading aloud one of those old romances of chivalry which were at that period so much in favour.

"Really a wandering knight?" pursued the lady, in accents of incredulity.

"Indeed and in truth."

"And in search of adventures?"

"Yes, though when I set out to-night I little thought that I was about to experience so much happiness, or, as I said before, that my eyes would be gladdened by such a galaxy of beauty."

The ladies fluttered their dresses and looked at each other, but they were so overcome at having encountered, as they imagined, one of their favourite heroes of romance, that they could say nothing.

"Ladies," said Claude, after the silence had continued a moment or so, "believe me, I could remain thus for ages feasting my eyes upon your beautiful features; but you, I doubt not, are all anxious to resume your interrupted journey, I should therefore esteem it a favour if you would answer me one question."

The ladies were at once filled with curiosity, and anxiously assured him that he was welcome to ask a hundred.

"Then, ladies," said Claude, with an air of affected embarrassment, "what I wish to know is, whether your favourite knight, of whom you have been reading—"

"Rosalba?"

"Yes. Well, I want to know whether he was poor?"

"Poor?"

"Yes—whether he was in want of money, or whether he possessed an ample share of that not-to-be-despised commodity?"

The ladies shook their heads.

"Then he was poor?"

"Oh, very!"

"Then I resemble your knight in more ways than one?"

"Are you poor, then?" they asked, with compassionate earnestness.

"Oh, very!"

Their looks bespoke their regret.

"I am even now pressingly in need of a considerable sum of money; and if you, ladies, could help me to it, I should never fail to look back during the rest of my life to this adventure with the liveliest sensations of gratitude and joy."

"Oh, it's impossible!" said the young lady who had been reading the adventures of Rosalba. "We have nothing in the shape of money with us except—"

"Ah, there is an exception."

"Yes, we carry with us what all true knights would regard as a sacred *depositum*."

"Ahem! May I ask its nature?"

"Oh, certainly! You see this young lady here?"

She pointed to one who sat nearly opposite to her.

Claude bowed.

"Well, that is my dear friend, Angela, and she is going to be married."

"Then," said Claude, "I take the present opportunity of wishing her every possible happiness which she can enjoy in that state."

The confusion which Angela now witnessed only made her look more charming than ever.

She thanked Claude for his good wishes with a perfectly intelligible glance.

"And the *depositum*?" he asked.

"That is her dower—her marriage portion."

"And have you that in the carriage with you?"

"Yes, in three bags, each one containing a thousand pounds."

Claude looked amazed.

He was scarcely prepared for the exhibition towards himself of such an amount of confidence.

The bride elect looked as though she considered her friend somewhat indiscreet.

"I should think that is rather an unsafe way of carrying money."

"But who is to know of it?"

"Why, I do for one."

"But that does not matter."

"I am glad to hear that," answered Claude, with a smile. "But you remember what I told you about my wants?"

"Oh yes; but now we have explained this to you of course you will not think of touching it."

Claude was amused at the confident tone in which the young girl spoke.

"My wants are so very pressing," he said, "that—"

He was regarded with surprise and suspicion.

"Really," he continued, "if you only knew now many misfortunes I have experienced lately you would not be surprised at my importunity. If there was time I would relate them to you at full; as it is, I must leave them to your imagination. Such a sum as you mention as having with you would relieve me of the whole of my troubles; and as for the bridegroom, surely he would be content to be united to so much personal beauty without wishing for the riches."

The words, and, above all, the manner in which they were spoken, awoke the girls from the illusion in which they had indulged.

They began to see their incaution in its proper light, and felt that the wedding portion was already as good as lost.

"I—I—am afraid," said the girl who had been reading, "that you have been deceiving us."

"I have not indeed."

"You cannot be a knight—I begin to fear that—"

"Nay—nay, be under no apprehension; I would not injure you for the world."

"I mean I begin to believe that so far from being a knight, you—you are only—"

"Only what?"

"A high—"

"Wayman?"

"Yes!"

"Surely you would not call me by so harsh a name?"

"That depends upon your demeanour, sir."

"Then I'm afraid you will have to think harshly of me. If I was not so much pressed I would allow you to pass free, but as it is—"

They were all pale now and trembling.

"I regret to say that I must have the dower; and you will always be able to have the satisfaction of reflecting that it will be of infinitely more service to me than it could possibly be to the intended bridegroom."

"Nay, nay—do not be so cruel!"

"The cruelty is on your side, fair ladies, to deny me thus."

"Must you have it?"

"I must."

The bride elect burst out into a passion of tears.

She sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Must you have all?" the other asked again.

Claude's heart was touched by the distress he witnessed—so much so that his heart seemed in danger of melting altogether, for he was one that could not bear to contemplate the spectacle of a fair and lovely being in tears, and know himself to be the cause.

"I will not take all," he said after a momentary pause; "and do not any longer accuse me of harshness or cruelty."

"How much do you demand, then?"

"One-third only of the whole amount. Surely you will consider that proposition a reasonable one. My urgent needs will be temporarily supplied, and the bride will suffer no great loss of fortune."

Every occupant of the carriage was by this time half fainting with terror.

The bride half dried her tears.

Then, stooping down, she pulled from beneath the seat a small valise.

So great was her agitation that she could scarcely insert the key into the lock.

At length she succeeded, and produced a bag, which was evidently very weighty.

It was handed to Claude, who lowered his eyes when he received it, for he could tell that all the ladies were

gazing upon him with very different looks to those with which a short time before they had regarded him.

The bride's distress now much increased.

"Shall you really take it?" said the young lady who had carried on most of the conversation.

"I cannot leave it. What am I to do?"

As he spoke, Claude placed the heavy bag into his pocket, though his conscience smote him heavily as he did so.

The whole party was now in tears.

Claude half turned away.

But his heart failed him.

Looking once more into the carriage, he said:

"Believe me, ladies, I cannot depart and carry away with me the knowledge that I am leaving so much acute distress behind me—I cannot—indeed, I cannot, so I fear that, despite all the inconveniences to which I shall inevitably be exposed, I must leave this wealth behind me."

"Nay—nay," said the bride, speaking only by a very great effort. "Take it, sir—take it, and depart!"

"I cannot," said Claude. "And yet I cannot bring myself to depart altogether empty-handed. Ladies, I will tell you what I will do. Listen to my proposition."

The utmost curiosity was manifested.

"This wealth," said Claude, producing the bag, "can be recovered—that is, if you are willing to pay ransom for it."

"Ransom?"

"Yes."

"But what ransom can we pay?"

"One that I hope will not cost you so much reluctance and grief as this. What say you—do you consent?"

"That depends upon the nature of the ransom. What is it?"

Claude smiled a roguish smile, and said:

"That each of you fair ladies will come one by one and press your sweet and charming lips to mine. If that is done, you are welcome to your gold, for I should prize such a favour above a dukedom."

This audacious proposal was received with six separate and distinct screams of dismay.

"Are you in earnest?" said the lady who had held the lamp.

"I assure you I am."

"Then you are a most audacious wretch!"

"Just so."

"And very ugly."

"That is why I admire your beauty so much."

"But really, in order to get rid of such a disagreeable monster one ought to be prepared to do disagreeable things, so I will set an example to the rest. I feel that I am most to blame for making you acquainted with the fact of the money being with us, and that I ought to pay the penalty. Take off your hat, sir, and as I contributed to place that money in your possession, I will do my best to recover it."

With these words, she rose and shook her curls carelessly and yet saucily from her brow.

Claude, with a throbbing heart, removed his hat.

His veins tingled with anticipated pleasure.

The young girl drew back once or twice without having the courage to carry out her intention.

Her colour rose to her very temples, for she could observe what glances of intense admiration Claude bent upon her.

Suddenly she bent forward and just touched the high wayman's lips with hers.

So quickly and so lightly was the act performed, that a bystander might well have been in some doubt what'er the salute was given or not.

But in spite of its transiency, Claude was in no doubt upon the subject.

The light, scarcely-perceptible pressure of her lips upon his own thrilled through every nerve and fibre of his body like an electric shock, only the feeling was one of the most intense and intoxicating pleasure that can by any possibility be conceived.

Claude was confused—overpowered.

He was recalled to himself by hearing her say:

"There, sir, your claim is paid. Now, then," she continued, "follow my example, and then we shall be so, never to rid of him."

But the manner in which she spoke clearly showed that she was by no means so displeased with Claude as her words would have led anyone to imagine.

The bride elect was the next who paid her share of the ransom, and the others, after many pretty delays, followed.

The last kiss was given, but none impressed Claude like the first.

"Here is the prize," he said, as he surrendered the bag of gold. "Take it; and my fervent wishes will always be for your happiness and welfare! Farewell!"

"Stay," said the young girl. "You have forgotten the lamp."

Claude in his excitement had forgotten it.

He gave it back with a smile, and as he did so his fingers came in contact with hers.

He would have given much to have pressed it in his own.

"Once more, ladies," he said, "farewell! I trust you will perform the remainder of your journey unmolested."

"We have very little further to go."

Claude once more raised his hat and bowed.

"Stay!" said the young girl again.

He stopped at once.

"Now and ever," he exclaimed, fervently, "I am at your commands."

"You will not leave us until we know who you are?"

"A wandering knight."

"Yes, I know—you said that!" she answered, half impatiently. "What I want to hear is your name."

"It—it is—"

"Yes, yes. What?"

"Claude Duval!"

The announcement was received with the utmost astonishment conceivable.

But Claude would not linger now.

"Come, Jack," he cried, "away—away!"

He galloped off as he spoke, leaving his comrade to follow him.

They did not pull up until the next hill was reached.

"Well, Claude, what luck?"

"Eh?" said Claude, with a start, for his thoughts were so busily engaged that he had not heard his companion's question.

"What luck, I say?"

"None, if you mean booty."

"How! did not I hear something about three thousand pounds?"

"Yes."

"Let me know."

Claude related the adventure.

"And you actually had a thousand pounds in your hands?" asked Jack.

"I believe so."

"And you gave it back?"

"I did. I could not find it in my heart to keep it."

"Ah, Claude, my friend, it is all very fine for you to say that, but it seems to me pretty clear that my turn ought to come next, for you had decidedly the best of that adventure."

CHAPTER MXXVIII.

TOM KING HEARS UNEXPECTED FINDINGS OF MAUD, AND SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE JOLLY TAR INN.

LEAVING SIXTEEN-STRING JACK and Claude Duval for awhile, we now revert to the proceedings of Tom King, whose adventures on this particular night will be found to possess no ordinary amount of interest.

The route which he took was exactly that which Maud had followed.

Of this he was ignorant, though he knew he was making his way towards the Jolly Tar Inn, so that he was particularly careful in all his movements.

As he thus slowly rode down the lane, looking keenly in every direction, he fancied he saw some glittering object lying upon the ground.

It caught his eye only for a moment.

He stopped, however, and proceeded to search more closely.

The result was that he found, close to the edge of the ditch, a bracelet, which he recognised in a moment as having belonged to Maud.

Here, then, was something like proof positive that he had got upon the right track.

He remained gazing upon the jewel for some moments in deep thought.

He was more than half inclined to ride back after his comrades, and make them acquainted with his discovery.

Eventually, however, he decided to do nothing of the kind.

Much time would have been occupied by the adoption of this course, and then it was questionable whether the search could be so successfully conducted as it could be if he was left to his own resources.

This decided him, and, once more mounting his horse, he rode with still greater slowness and caution down the lane.

On one side of him there was quite a tall hedge, and just as he was passing by Tom was greatly startled to hear a strange voice pronounce the words:

"Good night!"

Tom King returned the salutation, and at once pulled up his horse, greatly wondering who it could be that had thus addressed him, and what was the object for doing so.

Some of the twigs of the hedge were then parted.

It was not so dark but that Tom could see through the leaves the head and face of an elderly gentleman, whose countenance was certainly expressive of good temper and benevolence.

"I think, my friend," he said, addressing Tom, "I saw you pick up something in the lane a few minutes ago?"

"It is quite possible you might, sir."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Certainly, if you can show me any good reason why I should tell you."

"Well, then, it is just in this way. I happen to be Lord of the Manor here, and I always consider I have the best claim to anything that may be found hereabouts."

"In a great way, my lord, perhaps you have, but you certainly have not in the present instance."

"Indeed—why not?"

"Because what I have found happens to belong to some one with whom I am well acquainted, and of whom I happen to be in search."

"In search?" echoed the old gentleman. "Are you a police officer, then?"

"I am not."

"I thought you did not look like one; but come, tell me who this is of whom you are in quest; perhaps I may be able to afford you some information, for in default of having something else to do I occupy myself in walking over my property and making myself acquainted with all that occurs."

Upon hearing this statement, Tom King immediately became deeply interested.

It flashed upon him that chance might so far have favoured him as to bring him face to face with the very man who would be able to furnish the information he so much required.

Without the slightest hesitation then, he gave a full description of Maud's personal appearance, stating that she was a dear friend of his, and that he was most anxious to discover her.

"Have you seen anyone answering to this description," was Tom King's earnest inquiry, as soon as he had finished, "or have you heard anything?"

"I have not."

Tom was deeply disappointed at this reply, for he had suffered his hopes to carry him away.

"Can you tell me whether this lane leads?" he asked, at length.

"Yes, on to the London Road."

"And are there any intermediate places where you think she might be likely to stay?" asked Tom.

"Only two inns: one a long way off—just at the junction of the London Road, in fact—the other is not so far away, being just beyond the boundary of my estate."

Tom knew this perfectly well.

"As for the last," continued the old gentleman, "I have heard that it is a fearful place, though no suspicion

has existed until recently. I believe, however, it is one of those murder dens of which it is to be feared there are many throughout the land. If the young person you seek has sought shelter there, I fear her fate would be a sad one."

"The place is now in the occupation of police officers, is it not?"

"It is."

"Alas!" said Tom, with a sigh, "I fear I have a difficult task before me. Many thanks for the information you have been able to afford. Good-night, for time is precious, and I cannot linger."

The salute was returned, and Tom King resumed his progress down the lane.

His mind was now filled with many anxious thoughts.

That Maud had made her way down that very lane there could be little or no room to doubt.

The question was, what had become of her?

"Beyond all doubt," he said, "she was beneath that tree with Jack the Ostler. They would foolishly seek its dangerous shelter to escape the rain. Yes—yes, that must be so. Then when the awful catastrophe happened she would fly in horror. The rain and the storm would have no terror for her then."

As the reader is aware, Tom King came very closely indeed to the truth in these conjectures.

"Then," he resumed, "so great would be her alarm that she would run on at so violent a rate as rapidly to exhaust herself altogether. She would again look out for shelter, and if she happened to see this Jolly Tar, she would be likely to enter there and remain until the storm was over."

Still Tom felt that these were only conjectures, and it was quite possible that Maud had acted in entirely a different manner.

He was only judging by what he himself would have done under similar circumstances.

"If she entered there," he muttered, "I fear it is no use looking for her any further. She could scarcely escape the double danger. Still it would be satisfactory to ascertain her fate; and better me execute the task than Dick for he would be carried away too much by his feelings the enterprise would be doubly dangerous to him."

Tom was right enough here.

"I am afraid," he murmured, "that the police officers would arrive during her stay here. They could not fail to recognise her in a moment, and they would make her a prisoner, for she would not be able to do anything in her own defence. If so, they have had time enough to take her to London and lodge her in Newgate before now."

Tom was silent, but his mind was busily engaged in wondering by what means he could free himself from these suppositions—how he was to make certain whether they were right or wrong.

"There is only one course to pursue that I can think of," he said, at length, "and that is to go direct to the Jolly Tar Inn. There is danger in the adoption of such a course, but then I would gladly run ten times as much risk for her or Dick. Yes—yes, if she has visited the Jolly Tar I will take care to learn all about it."

When Tom had come to this decision his mind grew quite easy.

Many, however, would have wondered by what earthly means he was about to put his design into execution.

It seemed like a man running into the lion's mouth.

Our gallant friend, however, did not allow this portion of the affair to disturb him much.

His arrangements were soon made.

He rode on until he came to within quite a short distance of the place he wished to reach.

Then dismounting, he secured his horse to the branch of a tree that grew at some little distance from the roadside.

This much accomplished, he bestowed a careful examination upon his weapons.

Finding them all in perfect order, he crept forward cautiously on foot.

He made his way first of all towards the back part of the inn, for he believed that he stood a much better chance of gaining the rear of the premises unperceived by his foes.

Getting nearer, he found that all the windows at the back were plunged in profound darkness.



[TOM KING WATCHES THE MOVEMENTS OF THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

Indeed, so dark and so silent seemed the place, that he began to think that the police officers had deserted it altogether.

With a view of ascertaining this, he crept round with redoubled caution to the front.

Here, however, from one of the windows on the ground floor he discovered a faint light gleaming.

This was where the officers were watching, beyond all doubt.

Tom would have given much to know how many were engaged upon this important service, and what they were about at that precise moment of time.

This seemed to be impossible to ascertain. Accordingly, he retraced his steps to the back.

The yard was reached without difficulty.

Drawing nearer to the house, he began to look about him very closely, in order to discover some means by which he could effect an entrance.

No. 218.—BLACK BESS,

So far as he could tell, every precaution had been taken to fasten both doors and windows.

This was no more than he expected.

Still he kept perseveringly to his task.

He was rewarded by discovering a window which seemed to promise to answer his purpose.

It was a small latticed casement opening like a door—the modern sash window had not been invented then.

A great number of small, diamond-shaped panes were fitted into it, being held in position by means of a lattice of lead.

One of these panes Tom King had not much difficulty in removing, for the only tool he made use of was a clasp-knife, by means of which the lead was bent back.

With great care the piece of glass was lifted out and placed down.

"That much has been done without creating any alarm, I think," said Tom King to himself.

No. 218,

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

No. 219 will be Published next Monday.

However, in order to assure himself upon this head, he placed his ear close to the opening of the window, and listened intently for several minutes.

All was still, and certainly, but for the fact that he had seen a light shining from one of the front windows, Tom would have come to the conclusion that the house was empty.

Nevertheless, he had now every encouragement to prosecute his enterprise.

Replacing the clasp-knife in his pocket, he cautiously introduced his hand through the aperture he had made.

There was only just room—indeed, he found no little difficulty in turning the little button by means of which the window was secured.

At length, however, this important object was achieved.

The casement swung slowly open.

The way was now clear before Tom, if he thought fit to enter.

He bestowed another careful examination upon his weapons, listened intently once more, and then, with a nod of satisfaction, he stepped over the window-sill.

Having done this much, his first act was to refasten the window again.

He was plunged in the most profound darkness.

What kind of room it was into which he had penetrated, and what kind of furniture it contained, he had not the least idea.

To exhibit a light was something more than he dared do under such circumstances, for what would be more likely to bring about a discovery of him than that?

And yet he dreaded to advance even a single step, for fear that he should come into sudden and violent contact with some heavy object, and so cause such a noise as would infallibly reach the ears of the police officers.

To remain standing still was, however, quite useless and ridiculous.

Accordingly, Tom stooped down, and with his hands stretched out before him, groped his way along in this fashion.

To his surprise he encountered nothing.

It almost seemed as though that chamber was destitute even of a single article of furniture.

Suddenly, however, in spite of all his precautions, some hard, cold object struck him a sharp blow on the forehead. A slight exclamation involuntarily escaped him.

"D—n it!" he muttered, "what was that?"

He put up his hand to feel, and his grasp presently encountered what he found to be, after a little further examination, the handle of a pump.

There could now be no sort of doubt as to the nature of the chamber he was in, and its destitution of furniture was comprehensible.

Still groping on, Tom's hands at last encountered a door.

This he opened with a great deal of caution.

No sooner had he done so than the faint murmur of voices came upon his ears.

It was evident that either the speakers were a long way off, or else that a closed door intervened between them.

All was still profoundly dark—indeed, Tom was not able ocularily to distinguish one single object.

Adopting the same method of progression as before, however, he cautiously crept on, taking the sound of the voices for his guide.

He was now in a kind of passage, which was tolerably straight, and along which he was able to make his way with a certain amount of ease, for he had only to keep close to the wall upon one side of it.

Suddenly he encountered a door.

He paused at once, and carefully passed his hand over it until he found the fastening.

Before he ventured to raise the latch, however, he listened with an intensity that was almost painful.

He could still hear the murmur of voices engaged in conversation, but finally he came to the conclusion that the speakers were not just on the other side of this door.

Cautiously, then, the door was opened.

He paused, and was half inclined to close it again, so very audible did the voices now become.

A peep which he ventured to take enabled him to comprehend the cause of this.

With renewed confidence he glided into the room with which this door communicated.

The apartment in which he now found himself was

not altogether dark, but was pervaded by a kind of dusky twilight.

This proceeded from a door that was standing a little way open.

The clearness with which he could hear two men talking convinced Tom that the police officers were in the adjoining room.

Double caution was now requisite.

On tiptoe Tom crossed the room, nor did he pause until he reached this inner door.

He made his way towards the hinges of it, for owing to its position there was a chink here through which he hoped to be able to see his foes, and observe all their movements as well as listen to their words.

Scarcely had he taken up his station here, than he heard a voice say:

"Did you hear something then?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you?"

"Well, I might have heard a faint sort of a kind of a noise, but, as I said before, in a quiet old place like this you are sure to hear hundreds on 'em."

"But I tell you I heard something then."

"What was it like?"

"Why, like a door opening and shutting."

"Well, old fellow, if you pay attention to every trifle you hear like that you will have enough to do. Why you will be running about and a-worrying of yourself all night, to say nothing of me."

"But I am satisfied—I felt sure I heard somebody."

"Then you had better go and look."

"I will; and if I don't see anything this time, d—n me if I pay any attention to my ears again!"

A dark lantern—of that kind commonly carried by police officers—was on the table; but in order that they might obtain the benefit of a diffused light, the door was left standing open.

Taking this in his hand, the officer who had last spoken rose from the chair on which he had been sitting and advanced towards the door.

Tom King, hearing and seeing him, grasped his pistols tightly, so as to be in readiness to use them at a second's notice.

He was well aware that he was in most imminent danger of discovery.

Indeed, to escape being seen seemed next to an impossibility.

But Tom was prepared for the worst, and resolved not to yield himself a captive without a desperate struggle.

The police officer advanced about a couple of paces into the outer room.

He pushed the door open considerably wider.

The effect of this was that, owing to the position our friend had taken up, he was more completely concealed.

The officer held the light above his head and peered around him.

Tom held his breath, fearful that this slight sound should betray him.

It now became a very nice question as to what extent the officer would carry his investigations.

If he advanced far into the interior of the room he would scarcely fail to behold Tom King.

But his fellow-officer, who had been left inside in the dark, was beginning to grow impatient.

CHAPTER MXXIX.

THE EVENTS WHICH OCCUR AT THE JOLLY TAR INY BECOME EXCITINGLY INTERESTING.

"Now then, mate," he cried, "what can you see?"

"Nothing yet."

"Then come back, can't you, what do you want to leave a fellow in the dark all this while for?"

These words caused the other officer to turn back at a moment when, if he had gone a couple of steps further, Tom must have been discovered.

But such chances are happening every day.

"D—d if I believe my ears again!" he growled as he retraced his steps. "I'll shut the door—I sha'n't be bothered with hearing every slight sound then."

Tom was in despair.

If the door was closed, all hopes of listening to any part of the officers' conversation was at an end.

But his good fortune again befriended him.

"Don't make such a fool of yourself, Moggs. Sit down, can't you, and let the door alone?"

"I will when I've shut it."

"Leave it a little way open, I say, and leave the listening to me. If it is shut, how are we to tell whether there's any disturbance or not? I tell you again—don't be a fool; don't go for to make a hass of yourself!"

Moggs, for such apparently was the cognomen in which this officer rejoiced, growled out something that was not very intelligible, and came back to his seat.

"Stir the fire," said his companion, just as he was about to resume his seat; "you may as well now you're up, and put another log on—I am as cold as a key."

Moggs complied with this request.

There was already an excellent fire burning on the hearth, and when the embers were stirred, the blaze that shot up into the chimney imparted to the whole of the chamber a highly comfortable look.

"That's something like, Moggs," said the officer, as he rubbed his hands briskly together. "I shall feel quite like myself in a little while."

"That's more than I shall," growled Moggs. "I hate the sight of this infernal place, and I wish from the very bottom of my heart that I was well out of it. Whenever I breathe, the air seems full of blood."

"Oh, stow that!" said the other, with an uncomfortable movement. "What do you want to be talking like that for?"

"You ain't frightened, Joel, I hope?"

"Frightened? No, but what the devil do you want to say such things as that for? If you can't find anything more pleasant to talk about, shut up!"

"Oh, you be blowed! You always was a hountrious fellow, Joel!"

After this there was a pause.

From his post of espial, Tom King could see very well into the inner room.

Moggs was sitting in a large arm-chair on one side of the fire, and Joel on the other.

Between them was an old rickety table, on which stood several bottles and a couple of partially-filled glasses.

Both men were engaged in smoking.

During the lull in the conversation which now ensued, each sat with his eyes fixed upon the blazing fire, and smoked.

The atmosphere was so laden with the reek of tobacco smoke that Tom King felt once or twice as though it would be utterly impossible for him to resist clearing his lungs by a slight cough.

The first movement was made by the police officer who had been called Joel.

He stretched out his hand and took hold of the bottle with the intention of filling up his glass.

"I told you how it would be, Moggs," he ejaculated. "We shall have to go poking about down in the cellar for some more gin, or else we shall have to sit the rest of the night without any."

"Is it all gone?"

"Not quite, but it will be by the time you have filled your glass. Come, pour up! Don't shirk the bottle!"

Moggs complied.

"I was thinking, Joel," he remarked, after having drank about half a glass of gin.

"Thinking what about?"

"Why, this here place, and what a rum start it was from the first."

"Very rum indeed! How was it that it got found out?"

"Don't you know?"

"Do you think I should have asked you if I did?"

"Well, you needn't be so sharp—I thought you did. But if you think it rum now, I'm blessed if I know what you'll think of it when you come to hear the pertik'lars."

"Let's hear 'em, then."

"Why, one day, as a cove was a-going down the lane, what should he see but a picco of paper."

"A piece of paper?"

"Yes, it came fluttering out of one of the top windows, you understand, and naturally dropped in the road."

"In course!" said Joel, with a grave nod.

"When the cove picks up this paper and reads it—which of course he did—what should he see in it but that the inn was a den of murder, where all travellers who entered with money were dropped down a deep well in

the cellar and never heard on arterwards, and a requesting him to let the police know about it without delay, for the writer of this here precious note was kept a close prisoner upstairs, and that he had managed to write by dipping a stick in his own blood."

Joel at this point of the narrative removed the pipe from his mouth, and sat with his jaws fixed open, waiting for what was coming next.

"Well," said Moggs, "I don't say that there's anything very extraordinary so far, but what I look at is this—when we gets in here, we finds only a man and his wife and a dead body, but not no signs of the person wot had wrote that note. You know there wasn't."

"No—no, that's right."

"Well; then, I want to know who it was that wrote it."

"Mightn't it be the dead body?"

"How could it be, you fool?"

"Why, I means before it was a dead body."

"Oh!"

"What do you think?"

Moggs very gravely shook his head several times.

"You don't think it?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because I've formed my own opinion."

"And what may that be?"

Moggs glanced around him with evident apprehension. Then sinking his voice to a very low key, he said:

"Why, Joel, it's my own private and particular opinion that the letter was wrote by the ghost of one of the persons wot have been murdered here."

Joel pushed his chair back several paces, as he gasped:

"No—no, Moggs, you don't mean that?"

"Indeed, but I do."

"Pooh—nonsens! I'll never believe it!"

"Nobody axed you to that I knows on. You needn't without you like."

"Then I won't."

"Perhaps, then, you will tell me how it was that the letter came to be wrote?"

Joel sat silent for some moments.

Then, very diffidently, he remarked:

"You seem to have forgotten all about those folks that ran away. How do you know but that it might be one of them?"

Moggs regarded his companion with the utmost contempt.

"Why, you ninny," he cried, "do you think they'd run away after writing like that? Why, we should be the very folks to take care of them, shouldn't we?"

"It's a mystery to me altogether."

The reader may perhaps be able to imagine with what intense eagerness Tom King listened to every word of this conversation.

Indeed, so absorbed was he by it, that he became unconscious of everything else.

He would have given much to have been able to ask one or two questions.

Most anxious was he to obtain some additional information about those who had ran away from the inn on the approach of the officers, but this information was not likely to be imparted, because one officer probably knew as much about the matter as the other.

Of course it was to the flight of Hunch and Mand that they were alluding.

A remark dropped by Joel, however, set Tom in a perfect fever of impatience.

"But don't they declare," he said, "that one of those who ran away was a woman?"

"Yes, they say so, but I don't know how true it is, for I was no more in the pursuit than you were. But they did not catch her, and, ten to one, would not have had the other but for the accident."

"You mean the hunchback?"

"Yes."

"What an odd-looking creature he is."

"Don't name it," said the other; "I can't get his horrible face out of my mind. Why they didn't leave him in the road, I don't know. Curse them for bringing such a thing under this roof, say I! There's horror enough already!"

Both shuddered, and again there was a pause.

Tom's excitement and anxiety now knew no bounds.

"If it was a woman," remarked Moggs, at length, "she must have been a regular out-and-outer. Why, she made no more account of a pistol bullet than nothing at all, and rode like the very devil himself."

"Yes," assented Joel; "and then I have heard of highwaymen slipping off their horses while going at full speed, and then hiding while the officers went by in pursuit of the riderless horse; but the idea of a woman. Oh, no, it's out of the question. It was no woman, I'll be bound."

"But they say it was."

"I know they do, but I don't believe it—no, not a bit; and now then, as all the gin is gone, let me ask you what is to be done for some more?"

"Go down in the cellar."

"It's very fine to say that; but who would relish the idea of doing that now? Why, it must be close upon midnight."

"Well, for my part," said Moggs, as he settled himself more comfortably in his chair, "I consider it would be nothing more nor less than flying in the face of providence to go down in the cellar where that well is at this time of night; and so I tell you, plump and plain, I don't intend to do anything of the sort!"

Joel grumbled and growled for some moments in an inarticulate voice.

Then he took up the bottle and carefully drained out of it the very last drop that it contained.

"A nice, pretty go," he muttered, "to sit here for six or eight hours and no more to drink than this!"

"Hold your row!" said Moggs.

"I shan't!"

"Then if you want some gin, why the devil don't you go down in the cellar and fetch it?"

"You come with me."

"I shan't!"

"What are you afraid of?"

"Never mind. In that cellar there's a well."

"D—n the well!"

"Oh, you can curse it if you like, but I wouldn't do such a thing, and I'm not very particular, as you know. There's nobody knows how many dead bodies are lying at the bottom of that well, and let me ask you whether the spirit belonging to any one of them could rest quiet in such a grave? In course not!"

"Shut up!"

"It don't stand to reason," continued Moggs, altogether ignoring his companion's injunction. "In course it don't stand to reason to think of any man coming here and going to bed, and then being murdered in his sleep and his body thrown down that well where——"

"Shut up!" yelled Joel, in such stentorian tones that the voice of his companion was completely drowned.

"Shut up, I say!"

"Who's afraid now?" sneered Moggs.

"Why you!"

"No I ain't, it's you!"

"Why——"

What more would have been said no one can possibly form the least idea, for it was just at this point that the two speakers were interrupted by a loud, heavy, and long-continued knocking.

CHAPTER MXXX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE TOM KING'S ADVENTURES WITH THE OFFICERS.

SIMULTANEOUSLY the two police officers sprang to their feet—

Simultaneously they made a rush—with what purpose is not clear—and both in one direction.

The consequence was that one came in contact with the other, and with so much violence that the breath was knocked out of both.

It was a wonder the table was not overturned.

Bang—bang—bang—bang! came the knocking again, and this time with so much violence that it echoed and re-echoed through the silent house like the clangour of ten thousand hammers.

The panic of the two officers increased.

Tom King was in no slight degree perturbed.

Once more his hands grasped his pistols.

This knocking, he thought, could not fail to presage danger to him.

It was mysterious and unexpected, or the officers would not be so disconcerted by it.

"Moggs," gasped Joel, at length, "who's that knocking?"

"How the devil do you think I should know, you fool? Let go, can't you! What do you want to claw me like a wild cat for?"

"I ain't!"

The officers separated.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Joel—"you're frightened—that's it!—so d—nably frightened that you don't know what you are about!"

"Bah! Go and see what the knocking is, and don't be a hass!"

"Go yourself!"

"I shan't!"

"Pick up the lantern, then, and come with me."

"Pick it up yourself!"

"Do you know who you're a speaking to, eh?"

"Yes; do you?"

"Yes, I——"

During this brief colloquy there had been a cessation of the furious knocking.

It almost seemed during the interim that the two officers would work themselves up to fighting point.

But then, with great suddenness, the knocking was renewed.

The sound appeared to cause all their valour to sink down into their shoes.

Their mutual recrimination ceased, and while the knocking lasted all they were capable of doing was to hold fast to the backs of the chairs on which they had been seated, and stand stock still with wide-open mouths.

"It's—it's," gasped Joel—"it's the ghostesies, Moggs! I feels sure of it—I knows it!"

"Gammon!" replied Moggs, though the incredulous word was uttered in anything but a decided tone.

"It—it must be!"

"No—no!" said Moggs, faintly.

"What is it, then?"

"Somebody at the door."

"Door?—what door?"

"Why, the front door."

"Who could be there at this time of night?"

"How should I know? Travellers, perhaps."

"And do you think travellers would knock like that? Just hark!"

The knocking was more furious than ever.

Moggs and Joel listened for some time in silence.

It is to be presumed that a little reflection came to their aid.

Certain, however, is it that after an interval it began to dawn upon their obtuse mental faculties that the knocking could only be caused by some one outside clamouring for admittance.

"You're a fool, Joel!" said Moggs, speaking in something like a reasonable voice.

"So are you!" retorted Joel.

"Come along!" cried Moggs, as he snatched up the light off the table—"come along, and let us see who is there. If we are not quick they will have the door down!"

Joel was not disposed to remain in the dark, so he followed closely in his companion's footsteps.

So rapidly did they make their way across the outer room that they never once glanced behind them, so Tom King remained in his place of concealment undetected.

But the question was, how long would he remain so?

Tom had come, as he believed, to a correct conclusion regarding the cause of the knocking.

He was quite under the impression that by some means or other a detachment of police officers had tracked him there.

If this was so, what was he to do?

He glanced rapidly around him, but he could see no outlet for escape.

That his present hiding-place would not be tenable much longer was certain.

Even if the knocking had a different origin to what he was persuaded it had, no one could possibly enter the outer room from the passage without seeing him.

Tom gave up all hope of making an escape—at least, just for the present.

He looked about for a fresh place of concealment.

This was no easy matter, for the room would have appeared to be quite dark to anyone who had not been in it so long as Tom had.

A dim kind of twilight came from a small unshuttered window, through which the dull night sky could be discerned.

Tom could only see one place that offered him the slightest chance of security, and that was behind a kind of screen or seat, furnished with a high wooden back, of a kind frequently to be seen at country inns to this day.

This was a very slight kind of hiding-place indeed—one that would not hold out against a moment's search.

But, then, it was what would suit Tom very well.

He had resolved that the moment he found his hiding-place was so much as guessed at he would sally forth and do battle with his foes as best he might.

Having come to this determination, then, he carefully made his way towards the screen, which happened to be only a few paces from him.

Less than a moment served to enable him to get behind it.

When standing up, he was able to see well over the back, and so command a view all around him.

This was the position which he first of all took up.

At the first approach of his foes he would be able to sink down silently; and so, with his head inclined forward, he stretched his hearing to the uttermost, in order to make out as much as possible of what was going on.

All these movements of Tom's were made very rapidly indeed, though the reverse might be suspected from the length of time which it has taken us to describe them.

Indeed, when he assumed the listening attitude just mentioned, the officers had done no more than reach the front door.

There was no longer any room for doubt about the cause and origin of the knocking.

Some one was outside most impatient for admission.

"Who's there?" bawled Moggs, speaking very loud, in order to conceal, if possible, the trepidation he was in.

"Let us in!" roared a voice, in authoritative tones. "Where the devil have you been all this time? A nice lot you must be to keep guard in a house, and not hear such a knocking as this!"

"Oh, stockings!" cried Moggs.

From this remarkable ejaculation, and from the fact that Moggs and Joel suddenly became as silent as the grave, Tom inferred that the voice which had just spoken was well known to them.

"Open the door, you dolt!" said the authoritative voice again—"open the door, I say! What the devil do you mean by keeping us here like this?"

"Is that you, Mr. Clarke?" said Moggs, but very humbly indeed.

"Yes, it is—of course you know it is! Open the door at once, and be d—d to you!"

The sound caused by the removal of bolts and bars now came quite clearly to Tom's ears.

Finally, a chain was flung down with considerable violence, and the door was opened.

Tom endeavoured to make out by the sounds how many people entered, but there was such a sudden rush of footsteps that he found this to be impossible.

"As we are here at last," said Mr. Clarke, "perhaps you will give us some account of your conduct!"

"Conduct?" asked Moggs and Joel both together.

"Yes. Didn't you hear me knock?"

"Yes," was the dogged answer.

"Then, why did you take no notice of it?"

"We did not know who it was," Moggs managed to stammer forth.

"Oh, didn't you? Well, it seems to me that the noise threw you into a devil of a fright. Why, you are as white as ghosts now! Yes, you must have been frightened to death, and afraid to move!"

There was a general laugh.

The approach of footsteps now warned Tom that it was time for him to sink down into his concealment.

He did so only just in time, for it was at this precise moment that the whole party entered the apartment.

Tom had the audacity, to come quite to the end of the screen and peep round it.

He did so very carefully.

At the first glance he perceived that the number of the police officers had been increased to five.

There were Moggs and Joel, the one who had been called Mr. Clarke, and two others, who brought up the rear.

Without troubling themselves much to look about them, they passed through the doorway into the adjoining room.

"I'll be d—d," said Mr. Clarke, whose voice was so peculiar that Tom could easily recognise it—"I'll be d—d if this don't look like being comfortable! You won't care about being disturbed, I'll warrant."

"Shan't we!" said Moggs. "I only wish as how I was never going to see the blessed place again!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"There's nothing to drink," was the reply—"at least, nothing without going down into the cellar to fetch it."

"And is that too much trouble?"

"Trouble? It ain't a question of trouble. I should like to see the man that could do it."

"Why, not go down?"

"Not at night."

"Why not?"

"Because of the well."

"What well?"

"The one with the dead bodies in it."

"Bah!"

Moggs was silent.

"You are frightened," said Clarke—"yes, that's it. You have sat here talking to one another until you have both got horribly afraid. Don't deny it; I can see it in your looks. I know as well as if I saw you that our knocking almost frightened you out of what little wits you have got. Perhaps you thought a whole troop of ghosts were coming down upon you at once. Ha, ha!"

The two officers who had arrived in company with Mr. Clarke laughed heartily.

But neither Moggs nor Joel could see the fun.

"You did not expect to be disturbed, I'll warrant," said Clarke, after a pause, during which he had been amusing himself by stirring the fire vigorously; "but you will have to change your quarters, let me tell you."

It was at this moment that Tom King, having the audacity to quit his place of concealment, reached the door and took another peep through the chink.

He saw Moggs and Joel looking considerably surprised upon hearing this last announcement made by their chief, Mr. Clarke, who continued speaking:

"Knight and Cunningham will take your places here," he said, "and you will return with me to London."

"Very glad to hear it," muttered Moggs, while Joel gave a sigh expressive of the relief which he experienced.

"Don't believe you," said Clarke. "It's a d—d sight colder outside than it is here, let me tell you; and what is more, it's beginning to rain."

"I don't care," said Moggs, resolutely.

"Nor I," answered Joel, with equal determination.

"You are a couple of chicken hearts," said Clarke—"that's what you are. I can see you are frightened almost to death now."

"We have been frightened," said Moggs, "and I don't go for to deny it."

"But upon what grounds?"

"Never mind; let those who are left here find out for themselves. I don't care how soon I am out in the cold and the wet."

"Well, you will be in a moment or so," said Clarke, who looked curious and somewhat uneasy. "I want to start at once."

"The sooner the better."

"You are wanted to give your evidence before the magistrate in the morning," Clarke continued. "The prisoners now are under remand, and as you were here at the time of capture, you are wanted, though what for exactly is more than I know. If I had thought there was the least likelihood of your being wanted I should not have left you here."

"And what am I wanted for?" asked Joel.

"I don't know," was the reply. "My instructions were to bring you both to London, and to leave two police officers here in your stead."

"I wish them joy of the job, then!" said Moggs, rubbing his hands slowly. "There's nothing to drink on the table, but there's plenty down in the cellar to be had for the fetching. Ha, ha!"

In the laugh Joel joined, though somewhat feebly.

"None of your larks, now," said Clarke. "I have told Knight and Cunningham all the particulars—every one. They are used to jobs of this sort, and have courage enough to face a thousand ghosts—haven't you?"

Both declared, with a great deal of bluster, that their courage had not been overrated.

"I'll warrant they won't be frightened to death and unable to move if they happen to hear a tap at the front door, but will come at once to see what is the matter."

To this neither Moggs nor Joel seemed able to make an effective reply, for they remained silent and looked very sheepish.

"But come," continued Clarke, "we must be moving—there is no time to lose. I am not surprised at your getting a little nervous remaining here so long by yourselves. Come along—let us be off at once!"

Moggs and Joel were both quite ready and willing to depart.

Upon hearing this, and perceiving that the words were followed by an immediate stir, Tom King once more returned to his hiding-place.

So light and so rapid were his movements that he succeeded in reaching it unseen.

Clark in the meanwhile busied himself by issuing his instructions to the two men about to be left in charge, though the low tone in which he spoke prevented Tom King from catching the import of his words.

The next moment the threshold was crossed.

"I suppose there will be no fear about our being able to prove the charge against them?" Tom heard Moggs say as he followed Clarke into the outer room.

"Against whom?"

"Why, the people who kept the house, to be sure."

"I should think not."

"I asked," continued Moggs, "because it almost seemed as though there was some proof wanting, and that we were sent for to supply it."

"Well, it may be so—I cannot take upon myself to say. But be careful—remember the conviction must follow."

"I know. But, Mr. Clarke."

"What now?"

"How about the girl?"

"What girl?"

"The one you pursued."

"Along with the hunchback?"

"Yes."

"I should have called her a woman—she is more like one than a girl."

"Well, perhaps you are right. You have not heard anything of her since, I suppose?"

"Nothing."

"Well, as I said a little while ago, she's a regular cat-and-out. I have heard of highwaymen slipping off their horses while going at full gallop and then hiding in the hedge, but for a female to do it—there, I can hardly believe it!"

"It is true, nevertheless," said Clarke, in a tone which testified to the existence of no slight annoyance concerning the matter. "We caught the horse."

"Did you get any clue from that as to the rider?"

"None; but I have had a close watch set all around the place where she must have disappeared and, if my men only do their duty, she cannot fail to be discovered ere long."

"And have you no suspicion as to who she is?" asked Moggs, whose curiosity and interest were evidently powerfully aroused.

"Well, I—a—," said Clarke, hesitatingly.

"Then you have a suspicion?" cried Moggs, eagerly.

"I don't mind saying that I have."

"Who is she, then?"

"Why, it is my belief—founded on a good many circumstances—that she is no other than—"

"Who—who?"

"Why, the girl Maud, for whose apprehension so large a reward is offered."

"Do you mean Dick Turpin's wife?"

"I do. I cannot think of any other woman who would act with so much resolution; and, if you will remember, we have had more than one specimen of what she can do."

"But what should bring her to this place, and separated from all her companions?"

"That's just what I should like to know. But come, we have stayed here long enough. We can chat the matter over further as we ride to London."

With these words the trio, who had paused during this brief conversation, left the room.

Can the reader imagine with what breathlessness Tom King listened to every word which had passed between them?

So strongly was he moved, that he was more than half inclined to follow them at all risks in the hope of hearing something more.

For a moment he hesitated and was undecided.

During that moment the opportunity was lost.

A sudden bang came upon his ears, proclaiming that the front door had been shut.

The officers had taken their departure.

After this, for a little while, Tom remained perfectly still.

He was thinking deeply.

The next sound he noticed was that produced by the concussion of horses' hoofs upon the road, and which showed that Clarke and his two subordinates had fairly started for London.

Tom had now only two officers to deal with.

But what he had heard was provocative of much reflection.

In his own mind he felt an inward presentiment, which amounted almost to a conviction, that Clarke's suspicions were perfectly well grounded and correct.

What had become of Maud was the question.

Clearly she was not a prisoner in the hands of the police.

Neither was she anywhere about the inn.

These two circumstances being taken for granted, it became clear that Tom was not likely to do much good by remaining in his present dangerous position.

Having obtained this clue, what he had to do was to follow it up with the least possible loss of time.

Yet as the reader may suppose, Tom was in a good deal of doubt and confusion.

Maud's flight from the inn seemed mysterious, for who could be the person with whom she was in company?

"Clearly not Jack the Ostler," he said to himself, "for he was dead."

He could scarcely understand her making a new friend so very soon after she had lost her other one.

Yet the more he thought the more did his belief strengthen that it was indeed Maud and no one else of whom the officers had been speaking.

Many things pointed to this conclusion.

First he had indisputable evidence of the fact that she had recently been very near to the inn.

There was the bracelet he had found in support of this.

Then from what Tom knew of Maud's character, he felt certain that the presence of danger would suffice to stimulate her to the doing of deeds from which at other times she would have shrunk in the utmost terror.

When the police officers arrived at the inn, he could well imagine what desperate steps she would take in order to effect her escape, especially at a time like the present, when she would be impressed with the belief that she had not only her own safety to look after, but that the lives of the rest rested entirely upon her ability to warn them of their danger.

Having reached this point in his reflections, Tom King determined to leave the inn without delay.

It was certain that Maud, not long ago, had been in

the vicinity, and therefore he indulged in the hope that by making the utmost exertions he should be able to discover her.

But when he had arrived at this decision, he quickly became sensible that he should have some little difficulty in carrying it out.

The two officers who now occupied the adjoining room were of a very different type to those who had just left.

Tom had had ample opportunity to look closely into their countenances.

He was a little bit of a physiognomist, and the result of his examination was, that he felt they would by no means be easily deceived.

There was also a special and particular watchfulness about them, and he felt assured that if any slight noise of a suspicious character did strike upon their ears, they would not allow themselves any rest until they had used their best efforts to discover the origin of it.

Of course this alertness was no doubt mainly owing to the fact that they had only just entered upon their new duties, and there was a probability that after a time much of their vigilance would wear off.

But then Tom King could not afford to wait for this.

It was necessary that he should depart at once.

It therefore became a most anxious consideration for him as to whether he should be able to quit his place of concealment, cross the room, pass out at the door, and finally leave the premises without the watchers being aware of it.

Such a feat seemed like an impossibility.

But Tom King had great faith in his own powers, and therefore made no scruple of attempting to carry out his design.

Just, however, as he was about to quit his place of concealment, some words uttered by the police officers caused him to pause.

CHAPTER MXXXI.

EVENTS AT THE INN CONTINUE TO INCREASE IN INTEREST.

"I SAY, Knight."

"What now?"

"I have just been thinking that we ought not to have been so ready in sitting down like this."

"So have I."

"Confound it! I wish we had only thought of it a few minutes ago—now it's too late."

"What's too late?"

"Why, what we ought to have done upon entering upon this duty was to have gone all over the premises in every part, leaving no place unexamined, taking Clarke and those other two fools with us, so that we should have known what condition the place was in when we look to it."

"We most certainly ought," assented Knight. "As you say, truly, it is now too late, for they are all three a goodish way off by this time."

"I can't think how I could have been so incautious—so forgetful," said Knight, in a voice which showed the extent of his vexation.

"I can account for it, I think," said his comrade.

"How so?"

"Why, having to wait so long at the door was enough to drive thoughts out of anybody's head, and standing in the rain, too, all the while, after such a long ride; then, when we got in here, this fire looked so comfortable that I could think of nothing but enjoying it."

"That was it, no doubt; still, we deserve to suffer for our stupidity."

"I don't think it quite so serious."

"I do, though."

"Suppose now, as our clothes have got tolerably dry by this time, that we set out without any more regrets and delays, and examine the place ourselves?"

"What, alone?"

"Yes, there is no one to go with us, and I think we had better do it thus than leave it undone altogether."

"Yes, so do I."

"Come on, then, at once—there is nothing like time present."

"Right. But what cowardly fellows they must have been to be afraid of going down in the cellar for a drop of

something good! Do you think we shall be so squeamish, eh, old boy?"

"Not exactly."

"I think not. Now come on!"

"Nay, I have a fresh thought."

"What is it?"

"Sit down a moment, and I will tell you. A few minutes one way or the other cannot make much difference, nay, and the result may be important."

"What do you mean? Why don't you come to the point at once?"

"I will, never fear. First there are two dead bodies in the house, are there not?"

"Clarke said so."

"One a traveller, and the other a hunchback lad that nobody knows anything about."

"Yes."

"Well, we must have a look at them first; and now listen: These people have been carrying on their game for some time, have they not?"

"No doubt of it."

"Then their spoil must be immense."

"Not so much; I don't think Clarke found so very much value upon the premises considering."

"Nor do I, and that's what I have been thinking about. I feel pretty sure that there must be a great deal of swag hidden somewhere in this place."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, the fact of Clarke having been able to find so little."

"And a good reason too."

"Then my proposition is, that we look most carefully around, and what we find belongs to ourselves—no one will know anything about that."

"Certainly not."

"I have a presentiment that this will turn out a capital night's work for us; and what is more, the occupation will serve to make the time pass quicker."

"It will, and we have searched houses before to-day."

"Rather."

"And you understand share and share alike is the understanding?"

"Of course!"

"Then that being settled, we will set about the business at once."

The sound which now reached Tom King's ears convinced him that the officers were about to sally forth upon their questionable errand.

Our friends' position was now most ticklish.

Very little penetration or attention would have quickly convinced anyone that these two men were sharp and astute, and not by any means to be thought of at the same time as Moggs and Joel.

What Tom was anxious to know was whether they would commence their search in that outer room.

Nothing was more likely, and if so, nothing could prevent his discovery.

That he should be a match for these two men our old friend did not doubt, but yet he might sustain such an injury as would disable him.

He was therefore desirous of avoiding a contest, if such a thing was possible.

Another moment would decide the matter.

Like prudent men, the two police officers had carefully examined their weapons, so as to be in readiness in case of any emergency.

This done, they took up the lantern which the others had left behind, and sallied forth.

When about half-way across the outer room they paused.

Knight lifted the lantern above his head and glanced around him.

"There seems nothing here," he said, after a short pause.

"Nothing, but we will look more closely upon our return. It is no good beginning to do a thing in this middle."

"None at all."

"Come on, then."

"But we have not settled about where we shall commence the search."

"What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't mind! It will come to much the same thing, I suppose, whether we begin at the top of the

house and work our way down, or whether we begin in the cellar."

"No, no—the former is the best."

"As you like."

"We will go at once to the top of the house, and work our way gradually down. We shall pass over nothing, and we shall clear the way before us."

"Very good."

"You think that will be best?"

"I do."

"Then follow me—we will look for the stairs at once."

With these words, the two police officers quitted the room.

While they remained in it, Tom King had not ventured to draw his breath.

He had been crouched in the smallest possible compass behind the screen.

Now that his foes were gone, however, he noiselessly rose to his feet.

The sound of footsteps, the glimmer of the light, and the murmur of voices all grew fainter and fainter each second.

Still Tom listened.

At last the peculiar sound caused by the heavy riding-boots of the officers creaking upon the stairs reached Tom's ears.

Then he ventured to step out from his hiding-place.

The way of escape lay plain before him.

While the officers were at the top of the house, what would be easier than for Tom to slip out by the same means that he had employed to enter?

Fortune had favoured him indeed.

When the search was first talked about, the little window by which he had entered occurred to his mind, and, though he had taken the precaution to close it, yet the suspicions of the officers could not fail to be aroused by it.

Yet this danger was avoided.

With perfectly noiseless steps Tom crossed the room.

His intention was to make his way to the little window without a moment's delay.

But all at once he stopped.

A fresh thought had occurred to him, and he remained for about a moment in an attitude of deep reflection.

Then he seemed to come suddenly to a decision.

"I will do it!" he muttered to himself, with an air of great resolution. "It would be foolish to miss such a chance! I should ever regret if I missed it, and am glad I thought of it in time."

What Tom intended to do will quickly be seen.

He took one pistol in his hand, and held it in readiness for instant use.

Then he crept stealthily towards the staircase.

He had but little difficulty in making out where it was, for as yet Knight and Cunningham had not ascended so high as to prevent all beams from their light finding their way down below.

Cautiously, then, Tom began to ascend.

The reason for this sudden change in his proceedings was the intense anxiety and curiosity he experienced to have a peep at the body of the person who had accompanied Maud in her flight.

It cannot be wondered at that he should be anxious on this head.

He had overheard that he was a hunchback, that he had met with an accident, and that he had been brought back to the inn.

Now Tom not unreasonably thought that he should gain something if he could only take one peep at this hunchback's face.

Most people doubtless would have thought the risk by far too great.

Tom, however, considered the matter in quite a different light.

He believed that a special opportunity was afforded him, and that he should be much to blame if he neglected it.

Accordingly, he rapidly ascended the stairs.

The speed he made use of actually prevented any noise being made by his ascent, but yet when near the top he paused and listened somewhat anxiously.

Looking through the old oaken banisters, he could perceive a long kind of passage or corridor.

At the extremity of this could be perceived the gleam of light.

"I tell you there is no other way up!" he heard one say.

"Come on, then! I thought there was."

The officers now both approached Tom, who crouched down, scarcely comprehending what they were about.

Nearer and nearer they came, until they reached a kind of ladder which apparently formed a rude means of communication with an upper chamber.

This the officers ascended.

They were absent only for a moment, and then returned.

From their remarks, Tom understood that the ladder did not communicate with any upper room, but with the roof.

The officers did not trouble themselves about the staircase upon which Tom was hidden, for they did not so much as cast a glance towards it, so sure were they that no one could be there.

The first room they entered was the one nearest to the head of the staircase.

A moment only was required to enable them to examine this, and they came out, leaving the door ajar.

The next door was the one communicating with the room in which Maud had endured so much horror.

No sooner did they cross this threshold than Tom King, with the same noiseless step, bounded up the remaining stairs.

When at the top, one stride took him to the mat that lay just outside the door through which the police officers had passed, and which they had left half open.

Standing here, Tom was able to command a tolerably good view of the interior of the room, though he took care to keep in such a position as would prevent the officers from seeing him.

In this, however, he was almost unnecessarily cautious.

So intent and so absorbed were the police officers by what they beheld, that had Tom stood beside them they would scarcely at first have noticed his presence.

And no wonder at all was it that their faculties should be thus enwrapped.

Lying side by side upon the bed were two dead bodies.

At all times is death an unpleasant and uncomfortable spectacle, but on this occasion there was everything to aggravate its horror.

The first body was that of the traveller, whose corpse, as the reader will remember, Hunch had removed from the large chest and placed upon the bed.

The light from the officer's lantern fell full upon the face which Tom could tell belonged to one who might justly lay claim to the title of gentleman.

Upon his distorted features, however, there was an expression which seemed to convey the idea that at the moment of his dissolution he was conscious of the horrible and appalling fact that he was being secretly murdered, and that nothing more would be heard of him upon earth.

One glance, however, was all that Tom bestowed upon this unknown personage.

Lying by the side of him was Hunch.

The poor fellow presented a truly revolting sight.

His apparel had become soaked in blood, which had escaped from a wound in the breast, given him just as the inn was left.

Then his face was horribly battered, scratched, and disfigured, in consequence of the distance he had been dragged at the heels of his awe-struck horse.

His features were scarcely distinguishable.

Altogether, he was in a terrible plight, for the officers had carried him to the inn and placed him upon the bed in the same condition as they had found him.

"A nice piece of work!" said Cunningham, who was the first to speak. "It is not very comfortable to think you have got to keep guard over such things."

"Bah!" said the other. "Don't think of it except in the way of business; I never do, and I find it to be by far the best and wisest plan."

"If you can do so," replied the other, with a shudder.

"Come on, I have had enough of this."

There was an immediate movement, and Tom at once beat a retreat.



[TOM KING PURSUES THE FLYING FIGURE.]

His first thought had been to seek again the shelter of the staircase, but he feared that he should not be able to descend unseen.

A second thought told him that it would be much better for him to have the officers in front of him than at his back.

Accordingly, he just stepped to the door of the room the officers had lately visited, and which he reached with one stride.

To enter took him but an infinitesimal portion of time; and when once fairly in the chamber, he felt that he was about as safe as he well could be while beneath that roof.

The officers, having once satisfied themselves that there was no one there, would scarcely enter it again.

So thought Tom.

There was but one more bedchamber, and in that they

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remained so long that Tom was almost tempted to go and see what they were about.

His sense of hearing, however, enabled him to come to the conclusion that they were engaged in making a minute examination of the various articles it contained.

"I understand," said Tom, to himself, with a satisfied nod. "That must be the room generally occupied by the two wretches who kept this place. They are looking for booty."

This was no doubt the absolute fact of the case.

At length the officers came out again into the passage.

Tom just caught sight of their faces as they were about to descend the stairs.

It was easy to see that they had been baulked in their expectation of finding money.

"Depend upon it," said Knight, "they have chosen a good place to keep their ill-gotten wealth."

"But where is it?—that's the question."

"We must find out."

"I fancy that will give us some trouble."

"No doubt. But what does it matter—we have nothing else to do?"

"True; only it would be d—d annoying to work for nothing!"

By this time they had reached the bottom of the staircase.

Tom came from his hiding-place and looked down.

The officers were busy looking for the means of gaining admittance to the cellar—their impatience and the fact that they had made no discovery hitherto causing them to abandon their expressed intention of searching the house methodically.

The ground floor then was, by mutual consent, left unexamined for the present.

A door was found opening from under the staircase which apparently led down into the cellar.

"This is the way," said Knight. "Come on!"

He commenced the descent as he spoke.

His comrade followed without loss of time.

All now was dark.

As noiselessly as before, Tom King descended the stairs.

Once more was the way of escape open before him.

All he had to do was to make his way back to the little window by which he had entered, and so depart.

But again he hesitated to avail himself of this opportunity, though what he did seemed neither more nor less than daring danger to the uttermost.

An insatiable and uncontrollable curiosity, not only to see the cellar where the innkeeper and his wife had disposed of the evidences of their atrocities, but also to know what success the officers met with in their search for wealth, made him resolve still further to follow in their steps.

There can be no doubt this boldness was engendered by the success he had previously met with.

But other ideas were floating in Tom's mind—ideas which he hoped he should so elaborate as to cause them to turn out to his advantage.

What these ideas were will be quickly seen.

It did not take him more than a moment to decide upon his course.

By the time the two police officers had reached the bottom of the steps he was ready to follow them.

He did so, and discovered that now there was little fear that his footsteps would be overheard.

For some reason or other, the steps leading down into the cellar had been thickly covered with sawdust—

So thickly that, as Tom King descended, his feet sank deeply into it, so that he was absolutely able to make his way down with the noiselessness of a spectre.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOM KING TURNS HIS ADVENTURE TO GOOD ADVANTAGE, AND SUCCEEDS IN FRIGHTENING THE TWO OFFICERS.

WHEN Tom reached the bottom of the steps, he found the officers before him in a cellar of considerable extent.

There were few barrels and bottles to be seen, however.

In the centre of the sawdust-covered floor was a large, dark object, the nature of which he could not at the first glance make out.

This, however, he soon after found was the well of which he had heard such a horrible account.

It was bricked round to a height of between three and four feet.

This was the most notable object the cellar contained.

The officers at once advanced to it.

Tom, concealed behind the brickwork, watched them eagerly.

The one with the light held it so that most of its beams were thrown down the terrible abyss.

"How deep!" said one.

"Hark! I can hear the water! It seems to be rushing at a fearful rate."

The other loosened a brick at the side of the well, and threw it down.

There was a succession of sharp blows, each one following its predecessor more swiftly, and then finally a heavy splash.

"Depend upon it," said Knight, as soon as the sound had died away, "that no one ever thrown down that well would be found again."

"It seems like it. The depth must be immense."

"Truly so. But we shall not find here what we seek, so let us set to work."

Hearing this, Tom King drew back.

The cellar was searched thoroughly, but with no result.

Tom King, however, was much interested in noticing the business-like manner in which they set about their work.

It was clear they had had plenty of experience.

"There's nothing here," said Knight; "but still, don't despair—there is the other cellar to search yet. Perhaps there we shall be rewarded."

"I fancy that is the likeliest place."

"So do I."

Tom King up to the present moment had not noticed that there was another cellar beyond the one in which the two officers stood, and which communicated with it by means of a low, arched doorway.

The officers passed through this in a moment, and the effect was that Tom King found himself again in darkness.

Determined not to miss seeing what they were about, he quickly crossed the floor of the cellar—which, like the steps, was covered with sawdust—and cautiously peeped in.

He saw before him a number of miscellaneous articles, chiefly, however, consisting of bottles and casks.

The latter the officers examined very particularly, as though they expected to find what they sought concealed in one of them.

If such was the case, their expectation was quickly realised, for Knight suddenly gave utterance to a loud cry, which was unmistakably one of triumph.

"Here we are," he said—"here we are! Hurrah!"

"Quietly—quietly," said his less-impressionable companion. "Don't make too sure."

"Let's settle it at once."

Knight held in his grasp a small cask, or rather keg—one of the kind used for small quantities of brandy.

This apparently was of great weight, and the contents were loose and rattled, so that there were reasonable grounds for conjecturing that this contained what they wanted.

But Knight, as he spoke, took speedy and effectual means of removing all doubts whatever.

Depositing the keg upon the ground, he glanced around him, as though in search of something.

His eye immediately fell upon a wooden mallet and a chisel.

Seizing upon these, he, by their aid, quickly broke open the cask.

The head fell out, and immediately there rolled upon the ground a quantity of glittering objects of all descriptions.

Tom distinguished watches, rings, brooches, guineas, silver coins, and, in fact, almost every article of personal adornment that was of value.

The contents of the keg could not be estimated as being worth less than several hundred pounds, so the officers might consider themselves as being well paid for the trouble they had taken, as of course they intended to keep this little find all to themselves.

"Cunningham, my boy," cried Knight, in a voice of great exultation, "this is something like, is it not?"

"Rather; but no more than I expected."

"Ha, ha! it's capital. Now you see what a thing it is to have a little courage! Why, lor' bless you, nine officers out of every ten would be frightened to death to come down into such a place as this."

"I can easily believe that, for I don't half like it myself."

"Bah!—nonsense!"

"But I tell you I don't! I fancy that well scents the whole place. To me it seems as though I kept on drinking blood instead of merely breathing the air."

"Hold your row, you fool! What do you want to talk like that for? If you go on so, you will end by being as frightened as the rest."

"I—I can't help it! I shudder now, and my back feels as though some one was pouring cold water down it."

"Ha—ha! Well, this is rich! But I'll tell you what, mate, is the best thing you can do."

"What—what?"

"Why, turn the whole of your attention to this nice little heap of treasure here. Just look at it—fast your eyes upon it, and you will soon get the better of all those ridiculous fancies."

"I—I can't do it!"

"Nonsense! Here, have something to drink."

"I could not touch it!"

"Yes, but, d—n it all, you are not going on like this, I hope! Come, bundle the things together again, and we will carry them upstairs."

"But—but—"

"What now?"

"Why, can't you see?"

"See what?"

"That they are all covered with—with blood! Yes, look, there is blood upon every one!"

"I'll be d—d if I should have thought this of you, old fellow; you are quite beside yourself."

The officer's teeth chattered together like castanets, and his eyes rolled in the most fearful manner around the vault, as though he expected every moment to encounter some horrible spectacle.

The alteration in his demeanour seemed at first to be surprising; but then, when the nature of the place is duly considered, it is not so much to be wondered at.

It is a well-known fact, however, that there is nothing more infectious than fear.

Now, Knight was about as free from all kinds of superstitious, or rather supernatural, impressions as any man well could be, yet this change in his comrade's demeanour produced a marked effect upon him.

Cunningham seemed every moment to grow more and more overcome.

Staggering slowly back, he paused at length with his back against the wall, his eyes rolling, his teeth chattering, and drawing his breath in short and fitful gasps.

Tom King watched all this with feelings of the greatest satisfaction.

It was just what he had been wishing for.

He now believed that he saw before him the means of accomplishing the purpose which had been hovering in his brain.

After a moment's reflection, he seemed to decide upon his course.

With hasty steps, he made his way to the staircase and ascended.

With the same rapidity, he entered the room where he had concealed himself, and where he recollected there was something which would be necessary to the carrying out of his intention.

This was nothing else than a large white table-cloth.

It was really astonishing to observe with what quickness Tom moved the different articles that stood upon the table, and then removed the cloth.

Rolling it up into a small compass, he again descended to the cellar.

Pausing at the bottom of the steps, he ascertained that the two officers were still standing where he had left them, the one endeavouring to inspire the other with courage, while he was conscious that his own firmness was fast giving way.

Silently, Tom glided to the well and took up his position in such a way that the brickwork around it was between himself and the entrance to the inner cellar, thus serving him with a slight and temporary hiding-place.

His first act was to spread out the table-cloth, and then thoroughly to envelop himself in it.

The cloth was not long enough to cover the whole of the lower part of his person, but he considered that it would answer his purpose admirably.

One corner of the cloth he arranged to fall over his head and face, after the manner of a monk's cowl.

These preparations were made in much less time than

it has taken us to describe them, and by the time they were completed there was a stir made by the officers.

Tom crouched down as low as ever he possibly could.

The brickwork of the well was quite sufficient to conceal him from the gaze of the two police officers when they emerged.

The reader will perceive that Tom's intention was to give them a terrible fright.

To what extent he succeeded will be quickly seen.

"D—n it all!" cried Knight, "don't stop here! Come on! Help me to carry the swag, and you may go on how you like upstairs."

"I—I cannot touch it!"

"If you don't help me you shall not have a shilling of it!"

"The curse of blood is on all!"

"The curse of a fiddlestick! Hero—take the light! Are you afraid to carry that?"

There was no reply; but Tom concluded that the lantern was put into Cunningham's hands, for Knight said:

"There, there—hold it steady! Don't shake it about like that! D—d if I don't believe you will drop it, after all; if you do, we shall be in the dark, recollect!"

"No—no!" gasped Cunningham.

"But I say we shall!"

"I mean I shall not drop the lantern."

"All right then. Come on! That's the way. Pluck up your courage. What is there to be afraid of, I should like to know?"

Knight pronounced these words in a very defiant way, but yet it did not seem as though he was quite assured that there was nothing to be terrified about.

Stooping down, he picked up the keg of treasure, and, with heavy steps, advanced towards the doorway.

"You must go first," he said to his companion, "in order to show the way."

"D—d if I do, then!"

"How can I see?"

"I don't care. Put the treasure down."

"Don't you think you see me doing it, eh?"

"I do not want it."

"I do, though."

"Then carry it."

Thus disputing, the two officers passed from one cellar to the other.

Cunningham already was so frightened that he could scarcely move—indeed, it was only his strong desire to quit his present uncomfortable quarters that enabled him to make use of his legs at all.

Knight was just in that condition of mind which enabled him to preserve an outward semblance of boldness, but which would change into panic-stricken fear at the slightest unusual occurrence.

Just as the pair passed through the doorway, Tom King placed his lips close to the brickwork of the well, and uttered a low, deep groan.

The sound was most peculiar.

Tom himself was half startled by it.

The whole of the cellar seemed to ring with it, and to decide upon its source was assuredly a matter of impossibility.

It was echoed by a dismal yell from Cunningham, who gave so great a bound that it is ten thousand wonders the lantern did not fall.

Knight stood motionless.

Silently, and without the least sound, Tom King rose to his feet.

It so happened that the eyes of both officers were turned towards the inner cellar, as though they were under the impression that the sound had come from thence.

Tom extended one hand in a warning, denunciatory manner.

Just then Knight and Cunningham caught sight of him, and both at the same moment.

The view of this ghastly-looking apparition standing as though it had just ascended from the well, made what little courage and fortitude they possessed abandon them.

They were at first struck dumb and motionless.

It would have been an ineffable relief to both could they but have given utterance to the yell of fear that was

ready to burst from their lips, or if they could have fled from the spot.

But speech and motion were alike denied them, so they remained silent, rooted to the spot.

So hideous was the scene that Tom had much difficulty in repressing a smile.

But he saw how slight a thing would now suffice to put a finishing stroke to their alarm, and caused them to flee as though ten thousand demons were at their heels.

"Impious villains!" he said, in low and sepulchral tones. "Your doom—"

He had time to say no more.

The awful words, and the still more awful voice by which they were pronounced, dissolved the spell that had weighed upon the officers.

Simultaneously, awful yells came from their lips.

Then there was a crash and total darkness.

Knight had dropped the cask—

Cunningham the lantern.

The former fell to the ground with so much force that it burst, and the valuable contents were strewn in all directions.

But Knight was quite heedless of them now.

The lantern had slipped from Cunningham's trembling fingers, and after rolling over once upon the sawdust was extinguished.

Then there was an awful rush.

The officers were anxious to a degree to quit this horrible place, but that very anxiety defeated their intention.

So blinded were they by their terror, and so confounded by the darkness, that though the steps were within a few feet of them, they groped about vainly and fruitlessly.

Tom groaned again.

Their terror was redoubled, and the scuffling incredibly increased.

At last, however, the foot of the steps was reached, and up they went with greater speed than ever they had made use of before.

Tom was delighted to think his stratagem had been so successful.

So soon, however, as he was certain that the officers were fairly on their way to the upper regions of the house, Tom proceeded to put the remainder and by far the more important portion of his plan into execution.

This related to the valuables which the officers had been terrified into leaving behind them.

Hastily throwing off the table-cloth which had served him so well, Tom folded it and proceeded to put it to still further use.

The darkness was profound, but yet he was able to find his way without difficulty to the spot where the precious contents of the cask lay scattered upon the floor.

With great speed he gathered them together and placed them in the middle of the cloth.

No doubt, in his haste, many escaped him—indeed, Tom intended that some should remain in order that when a little calmness took possession of the officers, which would probably be towards daylight, they would be able to perceive that they had been tricked out of their spoil.

The anticipation of their state of aggravation gave Tom much delight.

By far the greater part of the valuables was placed in the cloth; and then hastily forming the whole into a large bundle, Tom threw it over his shoulder and hastened up the steps.

Upon gaining the top he stopped, in order that he might, if possible, form some conception of the whereabouts of his terrified foes.

But all was profoundly still.

So still that Tom began to think that they had actually quitted the premises.

Whether they had done so or not, however, or whether they had concealed themselves in some inner room, Tom took no steps to discover.

He felt that the best thing he could do now was to get from beneath that roof with all convenient speed, as at any moment the courage of the officers might return to them, and then an awkward encounter might ensue, as they would be in a state of absolute frenzy.

Accordingly, when he had satisfied himself that the coast was clear, our friend made his way as well as he could to the little window by which he had entered.

He succeeded in finding it without much difficulty, and gained the open air without hearing or seeing aught of his foes.

Altogether Tom had ample grounds upon which to congratulate himself respecting the whole affair, but most especially upon the conclusion of it.

The bundle upon his shoulder was both large and heavy, and he felt that it would not be over convenient for him to carry it with him to any distance.

He made his way with it to the spot where he had left his horse.

The animal he found safe enough, and very contentedly cropping the sweet grass that grew about its feet.

It was not until after some moments' consideration that Tom mounted, and then it was with the resolution to find as speedily as possible some retired nook where he could bury his booty.

CHAPTER MXXXIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING GETS VERY STRANGELY ON THE WRONG TRACK.

It was not long before just such a place as Tom King required presented itself to his notice.

At no great distance from the inn he came across a small pool of water, over which hung a remarkable-looking weeping willow tree.

Among the roots of this he determined the treasure should be deposited.

He had no other tool for the purpose of making an excavation except his sword.

With this weapon, however, he set to work in good earnest.

It was not the first time he had put a sword to a similar use, and so he worked rapidly.

Moreover, the ground was of a very soft nature, which assisted him materially.

As soon as the hole was deep enough for his purpose, he wrapped the cloth well round the valuables and deposited them in it.

The earth was quickly covered over and the place restored to its usual appearance—the superfluous earth being easily got rid of by being thrown into the water.

Tom hastened over these proceedings as much as he could, for he was well conscious that the night was wearing fast away.

He had set his mind upon discovering Maud's whereabouts, if possible, before morning came upon him.

Mounting his steed and looking well around him in order that he might be able to recognise the place easily again, he rode off in the direction mentioned by the two officers.

This was actually for some distance on the direct road to the old water-mill where Maud had had so narrow an escape from death.

Tom looked about him very cautiously, for he did not know how soon he might catch sight of his pursuers.

But for a long time his pains and trouble met with no reward.

All at once, on passing round a sharp curve in the cross-road, he believed he saw something like a female figure flit before him at some distance on in front, and immediately vanish round the next turn.

This was quite enough to stimulate him to the utmost.

Touching his horse lightly with the spur, he set forward at full gallop.

The next turn was rounded, and again the figure came in sight.

There was no room for doubts now.

It was unquestionably a female, though in the darkness the outlines of her form were dim and ill-defined.

It would seem as though at this moment that she became conscious some one was pursuing her, for she uttered a shrill cry, which was unmistakably one of terror, and bounded onward at a rate which intense terror could alone have enabled her to make.

Tom echoed her cry by another.

But his was one of encouragement.

He did not suffer his horse to abate his speed, and as he galloped on he shouted:

"Maud—Maud! Fear nothing! All is well! I have come to save you!"

But either his words failed to reach her ears altogether, or else her great alarm rendered her deaf to every sound.

for she continued to run with even greater swiftness than before.

But remarkably fleet as she was, it is not to be supposed that she could long keep ahead of Tom.

Yet although she must have known that to her overtaken was inevitable, she continued to strain every nerve.

Again and again Tom called after her, but with no more result than at first.

Once Tom's horse's head almost touched her shoulder.

At the same time she turned to look back, and the sight so startled her that she gave a tremendous bound, which at once carried her several feet ahead.

But it was a last effort.

With a wild, despairing cry, which thrilled strangely to Tom's heart, she sank down in front of him as though all at once struck down by lightning.

Tom uttered a shout.

He felt assured that nothing could save her from being run over.

He pulled the rein hard, and the horse, seeing something lying in its path, swerved aside, and with so much abruptness that Tom was almost unseated.

The effort he made to regain his proper position in the saddle increased the fright which the horse already felt, and he broke out into a terrific gallop.

It was some moments before Tom could bring him to a standstill, but having done so, he compelled him to retrace his steps.

On regaining the spot where she had fallen, Tom precipitately alighted.

He fancied she had lost all consciousness, but this was not the case, for on his appearance she endeavoured to rise to her feet and resume her headlong flight.

But her strength was gone, and she sunk down again with a moan.

Now Tom was never more certain of anything in his life than he was that this was Maud.

It never once occurred to him that there could be a possibility of its being anyone else.

What, then, was his surprise when he all at once discovered that he had been quite upon a wrong track.

Although not exactly morning, yet there was sufficient dim gray light to enable him to perceive that this was a young girl many years younger than Maud, and that her skin was so dark that she looked like an Indian.

Indeed, Tom came at once to the conclusion that she was not of European birth, there was something so foreign-looking in her countenance.

But for all that, the dusky features were truly beautiful.

No tiny bird fluttering beneath a hawk could have manifested greater terror than this young girl did when Tom bent over her.

Perceiving it, he endeavoured, by speaking in gentle tones, to reassure her.

"Fear nothing," he said—"do not be afraid. You have not, believe me, the least cause for alarm. I took you for another of whom I am in search."

Tom spoke without thinking whether his words would be understood.

Evidently, however, they were not only comprehended, but believed, for, raising her head, she clasped one of his hands in both her own, and sank down upon her knees.

"Help me—help me!" she said, faintly. "Help me and save me, for I am sorely in need of protection!"

"Be calm—be calm!" cried Tom, allowing her to continue her appeal; "such help as I can give you shall be afforded freely. Tell me what it is you fear."

The young girl glanced around her timorously.

She placed one of her tiny hands to her ear and listened intently.

Tom noted that the fingers were loaded with jewelled rings.

"I have escaped," she said—"escaped from a fate far worse than death itself. Yes—yes, I think I can now venture to say that I have escaped."

"No harm shall reach you while I am near," said Tom, resolutely, "so be under no more apprehension. Tell me what I can do to serve you?"

This was a question that seemed to cause the girl considerable perplexity.

Tom saw she was in deep thought, and waited patiently for her answer.

But instead of giving it, she burst into a flood of tears.

Tom allowed her grief to have full vent for some moments, for he knew how much her heart would be relieved.

Then, if possible, with greater deference, he repeated his question.

"Alas—alas, sir!" she replied; "I know not how to answer you—in fact, I feel myself unable to give you a reply."

"Can I assist you with my advice?"

"Would you have patience to listen to a few particulars of my life? If so, then—"

"Say on. Speak freely. Believe me, on my word, when I say that from this moment forth I am devoted to your service until I can place you in some safe position."

The young girl looked the thanks she was not able to express, and murmured:

"It is strange indeed to meet with so much sympathy. Believe me, I shall ever be your debtor."

Tom laughed.

"Think not of me in such a light," he said. "Indeed, the less you know of me the better."

His words caused a look of surprise to flit across her features, but observing that Tom stood waiting to hear the particulars of which she had spoken, she said:

"I must go so far back as to tell you that my mother was the only daughter of an English officer in India. She was his pet—his idol. But as she grew up, chance threw her in the way of one of the native Indian princes. He was young, chivalric, rich, and handsome. A mutual love ensued, which, however, upon discovering, her father sternly forbid.

"But his mandate was unheeded. The young Indian chief's tender entreaties, glowing pictures of the future, and assurances that in the end all would be well, proved of far greater power than her father's mandates.

"Flight followed. They were married, and a year afterwards I was born.

"It seems strange that I should tell you all this. Yet in a few moments you will perceive the necessity of it, for I am utterly friendless and helpless in a foreign land, where I have known little save unhappiness since my arrival in it."

"I am deeply interested," Tom observed; "and if I made any remark upon the subject, it would be to request you to enter fully into all particulars. Rely upon it I shall be a patient and observant listener."

"Thanks—many thanks! My reason for telling you so much of the past is that you may the better comprehend the present. My grandfather was bitterly wroth when he discovered my mother's flight, and his hatred now became as intense as his love had been.

"My father perished in a skirmish with his foes, and my mother after that endured many privations, all of which I shared, though I was then too young thoroughly to comprehend them.

"One day, however, the news came that my grandfather had died in England—that with his last breath he had forgiven his daughter and left her the whole of his vast wealth. At that time he was not certain whether she was alive or dead. If the former, then she was to make her way to England without loss of time; if the latter, then her children were to do so; and in case none survived, the property was to pass into the hands of a nephew of my grandfather's.

"This nephew was also appointed executor for the time being—I believe that is the proper word.

"My poor mother had lived so long without her father's pardon that she had ceased to hope for and expect it. The knowledge that his displeasure still continued, and the loss of her much-loved husband, weighed upon her spirits to such a degree that she pined away daily. I have heard it said that joy never kills, but it is certain that after this news my mother sank quickly into the grave.

"However, she started for Calcutta, in company with myself, her only child. We took passage on board a vessel, but ere we had gone a hundred miles my mother breathed her last.

"My position then was sad—sad indeed—sadder indeed, I think, than you would be able to form any conception of."

"But I must not linger. In brief, we reached London, and then I met this nephew of whom I spoke, and who I now learned had, in consequence of my mother's death become my guardian.

"When I saw him first I shuddered involuntarily. I knew not why, for there was nothing extraordinary or repulsive in his manner or appearance, and I felt as amazed at my sensations.

"He took me at once to a magnificent house a little way from London, and in a few days he began to make proposals of marriage to me.

"I felt assured that it was not love for me which prompted him to take this course.

"It was merely in order that he might not lose the money and estates.

"I at once replied firmly in the negative, and positively assured him that his suit was useless. But he took not the least notice of my denial, and urged upon me that it was my grandfather's last wish that we should be united.

"This consideration had not the least weight with me; indeed, as I had never heard of this before, I believed it to be neither more nor less than a fabrication made to answer his own ends and purposes.

"He little thought, perhaps, that I was one who would not be moved from a course resolved upon. Even had he prepossessed me favourably, instead of the reverse, his suit would have been equally in vain, for—there—there—was—"

"Another?" said Tom, perceiving her hesitation.

"Yes, one whom I had known from childhood—my constant playmate—one that I loved dearer than life—the only son of my father's dearest friend, and, like my father, a native Indian prince.

"We were affianced before my departure from the land of my birth, and he promised to follow me here with all speed."

"And has he done so?"

"Yes, and on his appearance my guardian grew furious. He called him a barbarian, and declared that his consent should never be given to such a union, and accordingly began by preventing all communication between us.

"At the same time he took prompt measures to coerce me into a marriage with himself. I resisted to the utmost of my ability; but it availed little, his power was so much greater than mine.

"At last, soon after sunset yesterday, I was suddenly surprised by the entrance of many persons into my chamber, which, though a luxuriously appointed one, was nevertheless to me nothing more than a dungeon, for I was not allowed on any pretext to leave it.

"I was amazed at what I saw, and for a little while was quite unable to comprehend it.

"But I soon discovered that every preparation had been made for the performance of the marriage ceremony.

"In spite of my entreaties, remonstrances, and resistance, a mockery of the solemn service was gone through. Those persons who were present were clearly mere tools of my villainous guardian's. In a few moments I was declared a wife, the ceremony being pronounced a legal and a binding one—indeed, all those present were willing to swear such was the case.

"This overwhelmed me quite, and I burst into a frantic passion of tears.

"My guardian approached me with an exultant smile upon his lips.

"'Fool!' he said. 'Did you for a moment think that I should suffer myself to be reduced to beggary by such a one as you are? No, no! Learn now, if you were ignorant of it before, that you are irrevocably mine!'

"His words rang in my ears like a death-knell. I was overcome, and in a faint voice murmured a request to the effect that I might be left alone.

"'Willingly,' he said. 'You need be under no fear that I shall trouble you much with my company. My end now is achieved, and I am content.'

"With these words, he left me.

"I sank down distracted.

"What was I to do?"

"I felt that the time had not yet altogether passed away for me to make resistance, and, impressed with this conviction, I sprang to my feet.

"I darted at once to the door of my chamber.

"For the first time for a long while, it was unfastened. When I found it yield easily to my hand, I could scarcely believe in the reality of so much good fortune.

"Without pausing to consider, however, I passed out, wondering all the while whether in his excitement my guardian had forgotten his habitual caution, or whether he believed that I was now hopelessly and for ever in his power.

"Be this how it may, I descended the staircase with a fast-beating heart.

"I was so fortunate as to reach the foot of it unheard--"

"There was a door close by opening into the garden; I gained it, passed out, and finally got quite clear of the premises.

"Before I had time to run far—for I fled with all the speed I was capable of making, though chance alone directed my footsteps—I became conscious that my flight had been discovered and a pursuit commenced.

"I had not time to think which way I should go—to me all roads were the same, so that they led me away from my hateful prison.

"My strength, however, quickly failed me, and I almost gave myself up for lost.

"My pursuers were coming on rapidly behind me.

"But in India I had had to fly more than once, and therefore knew what stratagem to put into execution.

"Observing a dark place in the road, I concealed myself behind the bushes that grew there, forcing myself among their roots, and lying so closely on the ground that I felt certain nothing but a rigid search could discover me.

"But my pursuers rode on without dreaming I should put any such stratagem into practice; and as soon as ever they were out of hearing, I rose again, and swiftly retraced my steps, for then I knew that I was getting away from them at a double speed.

"Ere long, I felt certain, they would guess what I had done; but before that I hoped to be on the road to a place of safety.

"Not to detain you longer, I can say that all this night I have been pursued, with difficulty keeping out of their hands. I was just congratulating myself that I had shaken them off at last when I perceived you, and, of course, at once took you for one of my foes."

"A very natural mistake," said Tom.

"Tell me," she continued, with greater earnestness than she had before employed—"tell me where I am to go—what I am to do!"

This was a matter not easily decided.

Tom looked thoughtful.

He began to feel that he had incurred a very serious responsibility.

The more he thought over his position, the more his embarrassment increased.

"Is there no friend under whose protection I can place you?" he asked, at length.

"None whatever. I am a total stranger in England."

Tom looked more perplexed still.

Just then he felt he had quite enough to do to look after his own safety without being burdened by anyone.

Still, his word having been given, he felt also that he could not run back from it.

What added to his embarrassment very considerably, however, was the fact that the Indian girl kept her full black lustrous eyes bent upon his face.

Suddenly, however, she started up.

A strange cry escaped her lips—a cry that echoed far and wide over the mist-covered meadows.

Then, in shrill tones of great excitement, she cried, clasping her hands together:

"Zariel—Zariel—Zariel!"

CHAPTER MXXXIV.

THE POLICE OFFICERS KEEP CLOSE UPON TOM'S TRACK.

It would be easy enough to say that Tom King was very much startled and surprised at this sudden change in the manner of the Indian girl, but then those words would be very far indeed from conveying a just conception of his amazement.

Her hands were clasped together, and her arms out-

stretched, while her eyes appeared to be fixed upon some distant object.

As soon as ever he recovered from the first shock of his astonishment, Tom turned round to look in the direction upon which his companion's gaze was riveted.

He then saw, riding along at a rapid rate, a young man whose appearance was very extraordinary, for he was clad in Indian costume.

Nevertheless, he sat in the saddle with peculiar grace and the horse which he bestrode was one of the most magnificent-looking creatures that Tom had ever beheld.

His speed and action, too, were in accordance with his appearance.

By this time the day had fairly dawned, though it was not yet light enough for distant objects to be described distinctly.

It was evident that the horseman had heard the words which had just been pronounced, for he reined in his steed with great abruptness and looked eagerly about him.

The spot occupied by Tom King and the Indian girl happened to be in deep shadow, so at first, owing to the uncertain light, he failed to perceive them.

But she was determined not to let him remain long in ignorance of her whereabouts, for she cried:

"Zariel—Zariel! Come—come! I am here!"

The words evidently reached the horseman's ears, for he immediately galloped towards them.

As he came nearer, Tom saw that he was both young and handsome, though his beauty was of the Oriental type.

The unmistakable joy and delight visible upon the countenance of the young girl, and the ardour of the horseman, very quickly let our old friend know that this was the lover of whom mention had been made.

When he had reached to within a few yards of where they stood the girl bounded forward, again pronouncing the singular but yet musical name.

Zariel, seeing her approach, at once stopped his horse and slipped from the saddle and, altogether heedless of Tom's presence, clasped her tightly to his breast.

The manner in which the embrace was received was quite enough to let the highwayman know that they were on the best of terms with each other.

To tell the truth, he was heartily rejoiced at this encounter, which had taken place just at the moment when his perplexity was greatest.

He was conscious also that he was not wanted any longer, so he quickly mounted his steed and rode off.

But no sooner were the first transports of joy over between the lovers than the Indian girl poured out a rapid account of what Tom King had done in her behalf.

Consequently, before our friend had gone far, he heard a loud voice calling upon him to stop.

He obeyed with great willingness, for his eyes having been busily at work glancing around him, disclosed to his view a small party of police officers.

They would have been invisible but for the fact that the just-risen sun, towards which Tom's back was turned, poured his rosy rays full upon them.

Moreover, at this precise moment of time they happened to occupy a slightly-elevated piece of ground.

To have gone on any further in that direction would have been madness.

So far as he could tell, Tom believed that the police officers had not been sufficiently lynx-eyed to catch sight of him.

He turned round, therefore, in a moment, and the first thing he saw after having done so was Zariel waving his hand to him.

On reaching the spot where the lovers were, Tom bowed and paused.

"We cannot let you leave us thus, sir!" said Zariel, speaking English with some hesitation and difficulty, and with a peculiar foreign accent. "I have just heard of your sympathy and devotion, and cannot allow you to part without making you some recompense for it."

"I seek no recompense," replied Tom, somewhat haughtily. "What I have done has been of my own free will and without any expectations whatever. In a word, you are quite welcome."

"But we cannot allow you to part thus," said Zariel—"indeed we cannot! Surely your position cannot be such that it is impossible for me to do something for you in return?"

"There is one question to which I much wish an answer," said Tom; "and if you have been riding far to-night you may be able to answer. That will be quite a sufficient return for what I have done."

"Speak—speak!"

Tom then gave a close description of Maud's personal appearance, and asked if he had seen her.

The reply was a negative.

"That is enough!" he said. "Farewell!"

"Nay, nay," said Zariel; "surely you will not refuse to accept of some slight hospitality? I cannot entertain you as I could wish, on a short distance off there is a dwelling where I reside, and to which you are heartily welcome if you will only favour me so far as to come."

These words caused Tom to hesitate.

He was thinking busily.

It took him but a moment to decide.

He remembered the officers of whom he had caught sight.

He recollected that it was not until midnight that he should be able to meet with his companions.

All the day was before him—the very period when it was hardest to conceal himself from his foes, and when he could do least towards a discovery of Maud.

These considerations rapidly presenting themselves to him induced him to murmur a few words of thanks for the invitation which had been given, and to accept it.

There can be no doubt the young Indian was in earnest, for his face lighted up immediately.

"Come, sir," he said; "henceforth I hope we shall be to each other as friends and brothers. Follow me; you are heartily welcome to share all I have."

With these words he alighted, lifted the Indian girl to the saddle before him, and led the way.

Tom breathed freely, for the direction was such as to lead him right away from the spot where he had seen the officers standing.

After this no words of importance were exchanged, for Tom King purposely kept some distance in the rear, in order that the young couple might converse freely with each other.

In a few moments Tom perceived a large, stately-looking edifice surrounded by a high brick wall, and which he doubted not was destined to be his halting-place.

"I ought to deem myself lucky," he said, "for surely beneath this roof I shall be able to remain a few hours unmolested."

His conjecture respecting his destination proved correct.

The young Indian prince rode direct towards some fine massive-looking gates.

His approach must have been expected, or at least perceived, for immediately upon his arrival one half of the folding doors receded upon its hinges.

A broad, well-kept gravel path was then disclosed, along which they proceeded rapidly, and finally paused in front of the mansion itself.

Quite a troop of servants—but all of them Indians, doubtless devoted followers of the prince—came forth, and after many salaams assisted him to alight.

But Tom slipped from his horse before anyone had time to reach him.

"This way," said Zariel—"this way. Would that I could give you such a reception as I should wish—such as you shall have if ever you visit me in my own land!"

Tom murmured a few words of thanks and crossed the threshold.

He looked about him with great interest and curiosity, for all that he beheld possessed the charm of novelty.

The young prince had endeavoured to make the interior of the plainly-built mansion as much like one of his own palaces as possible, and the effect was in consequence rather incongruous, and yet by no means unpleasant.

An Oriental repast was quickly laid before them, to which Tom did ample justice.

He was able to discover, however, among the frequent pauses in the conversation that the young couple were far from being well at ease.

His presence could not fail to be a restraint upon them, and therefore he resolved to relieve them of it.

Accordingly he pleaded extreme fatigue, and requested that he might be shown into an apartment where he could refresh himself with a few hours' sleep.

His request was readily complied with.

Zariel, however, would insist upon accompanying him to this fresh chamber, for he was grateful for what Tom had done in his loved one's behalf, and he felt that he could not do him too much honour.

The apartment they entered was, like all the rest, fitted up in Indian fashion.

Tom never could tell what it was that prompted him to advance to the window and look out, but he did so in obedience to an impulse that he could not resist.

Perhaps in his mind lingered some remembrance of the officers he had seen, together with the fact that this window being on an upper floor would enable him to command a tolerably extensive view around.

Be it what it may, however, this was his first act.

He shrank back at once.

At the very first glance he had caught sight of the officers.

They were on foot, and walking up the broad, gravelled path leading to the house.

Although some little distance from the window, Tom was able to observe their movements, though, owing to this change of position, he felt certain that there was little danger of the officers catching sight of him.

How on earth they could have tracked him hither was a mystery, for, of course, by no other supposition than this could their presence be accounted for.

What was to be done?

Tom asked himself this important question with a slight amount of uneasiness.

He glanced towards the prince, who at that moment was busily occupied in giving some directions to an attendant.

The moment the highwaymen's eyes fell upon him he was struck by an idea.

"Prince," he said, "one moment! I wish you to look through this window."

The prince came forward at once.

But, to Tom's infinite chagrin, the officers were out of sight.

"I wished to call your attention to some men I saw approaching. They must be concealed by that clump of evergreens. Yes, look—look! here they come!"

At this moment the officers appeared in view again, their disappearance being merely owing to the fact that the path they were pursuing wound round a large mass of dark-leaved trees.

And if Tom had had any doubt about the intentions and destination of these officers it would have been completely dissipated by their actions.

One who was walking slightly in advance half turned, round to those who were behind him, while at the same time he raised one arm and pointed towards the mansion.

That he said something was certain, though of course the distance was much too great for the words to be overheard where Tom stood.

Having pointed out the officers to the prince, he led him from the window, and said, in a low and impressive voice:

"Prince, there is no time now for explanation—let it suffice to tell you that those men you have just seen are my foes, and that they seek my life."

The prince at once carried his hand to the hilt of his jewelled sword, as if to show his readiness and willingness to do battle on his guest's behalf.

But Tom restrained him.

"They must be met by cunning, not violence."

"I do not understand you."

"I can soon explain."

"Do so—do so! Command me to the uttermost!"

The prince was so accustomed to sudden encounters of one sort or another in his native land that he would, if Tom had permitted him, have put the mansion instantly in a state of defence, and called upon his army of attendants to do battle.

But such a course as this Tom knew very well would eventually produce more harm than good.

Stratagem must be adopted.

"Prince," he said, "what I wish is to induce in the minds of these men a belief that I am not here."

The prince looked half puzzled.

"No hiding-place would be secure against them, and so what I want you to do is simply to disguise me in some apparel like your own, and, if questioned, merely say that I am a friend who has accompanied you from India."

The prince caught at the idea at once.

He clapped his hands.

The door opened, and he immediately poured out a torrent of words that Tom could not understand, but which he guessed were instructions what to do.

The servants rushed out, tumbling over each other in their eager haste.

But they made good speed.

Tom was attended by a wonderful retinue.

More hands than he could count were busy about his person.

He remained quite passive, for he thought he could not do better than resign himself totally to them.

Their dexterity was surprising.

Almost with the quickness of a magical transformation, Tom King's outward semblance was quite changed.

Last of all was brought some liquid in a vial, which was sparingly applied to his face and hands.

The effect was to impart to the skin of both that peculiar tint which so well became the prince himself.

This done, the troop of busy attendants stood on one side, and, for the first time since the commencement of these operations, Tom King caught a full-length view of himself in a large swinging mirror that hung opposite to him.

He started with surprise, as well he might.

He failed utterly to recognise himself.

At this moment there came one loud, heavy, blundering knock upon the front door of the mansion, thus making known the coming of the officers for the first time.

The fact that Tom's metamorphosis had been made complete while the officers were walking up the winding avenue will serve to convey a tolerable idea of how speedy it had been.

But our friend happened to be about the same height and build as the prince, so that the apparel fitted him admirably, and when thus costumed they looked like two twin brothers.

"Caution your attendants not to say a word about this, and to secrete my apparel," whispered Tom.

"It does not matter," answered Zariel, "there is not one that can speak or understand a single word of English; still it will be best to be on the safe side."

Some words of caution were then addressed to the servants, who quitted the chamber and separated.

In the meantime the officers were admitted.

"I think you can make yourself content now," said the prince, as he sank indolently upon a pile of cushions.

"Yes, thanks to you."

"Nay, do not mention it."

"I cannot forbear doing so."

"I am only too glad to think that an opportunity has so soon arisen of requiting you for the service you have rendered me."

"There is one thing——" said Tom, and then he checked himself.

"What—what? Say on."

"It would serve to blind the officers still more if we were to descend the staircase together, and go for a walk in the grounds. They would not be able to gaze at me so narrowly as they perhaps would if they found me in a room, nor would they be able to stay so long."

"Be it so," said Zariel—"the thought is good—come!"

With these words he arose.

Tom followed him quickly.

On passing round a bend in the staircase they caught sight of the officers down below in the hall.

They were endeavouring, though vainly, to make their errand known to the prince's retainers.

The latter, upon seeing their master approach, turned round and greeted him after the Oriental fashion, remaining with their heads hung down until after he should have passed.

Thus to walk right up to the officers was subjecting Tom's disguise to a very severe ordeal; but, then, he felt assured that the very boldness of this proceeding would go far towards causing success.

In spite of his boldness, he could not help feeling



[MAUD DEFENDS HERSELF FROM THE MILLER AND HIS WIFE.]

slightly uneasy at the consciousness that the eyes of so many of his foes were upon him.

But of this Tom admirably concealed an outward manifestation.

Watching the movements of the prince very closely, he imitated them as well as he was able.

He succeeded much better than he dared to flatter himself he did.

The foremost officer involuntarily made an awkward bow when he saw Zariel approach, and as he did so he said:

"Beg pardon, sir, I am sure—very sorry!—but we have traced a desperate character to the neighbourhood of your dwelling. We are most anxious to capture him, and wish for your permission to make a thorough search about these premises."

"You are welcome," said the prince—go where you choose."

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He waved his hand as he spoke
The police officers mechanically stood aside to allow him to pass.

Tom accompanied, as before.

So close did he pass to his foes, however, that his ample dress almost touched them.

But no suspicion of his identity was entertained.

It was easy enough to see that, and besides, had there been, those officers must have been gifted with an almost supernatural share of cleverness.

The prince and the highwayman passed out of the doorway together, descended the steps, and strolled into the grounds.

Tom had not been candid enough to give the prince his principal reason for wishing to be in the open air.

It was because he knew full well, in case of his disguise being penetrated, he should then have a ten times better chance of making his escape

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

No. 221 will be Published next Monday.

But that danger was to all appearances over.

Tom, however, was not one to suffer himself to be lulled into a state of false security, and therefore, although things seemed going on so well, he kept a vigilant look-out.

As soon as they had retired to a safe distance, the prince laughed lightly, and said:

"Excellent! No one could recognise you now, I feel convinced, so greatly are you altered. You are deserving of much credit."

"Nay—nay, the credit belongs to you. I shall ever be your debtor."

"No more of that. But it amuses me to think you should have walked before them in so barefaced a manner. I know not who you are, but that act convinces me that you are gifted with no ordinary share of courage. I should never have thought of so bold a thing."

Tom laughed.

In this manner a considerable time elapsed, during which the police officers were busily occupied with unnecessary labour.

By-and-by, however, they came into the grounds, and then the prince and Tom, without particularly appearing to avoid them, sought the shelter of the house.

Still it seemed as though the officers were by no means satisfied, but at length, after much lingering, they took their departure, to Tom's great content.

Again he betook himself to his chamber, but he did not venture yet to change his costume, lest he should be favoured by another visit.

All hope of getting a few hours' sleep, too, was at an end, for he felt that it was requisite for him to keep a sharp look-out from the window.

He maintained this position until nearly mid-day.

Up to that time all had gone well, and as he was overcome with fatigue, he flung himself upon the cushions and fell asleep.

It was not until dusk had fairly crept over the earth that he opened his eyes again.

Perceiving how late it was, he, after a little recoiling, resumed his own apparel, which he was very glad to do.

He had scarcely finished when the prince entered.

"With your leave," said Tom, "I will now take my departure. I have an important appointment to keep at some distance from this place, and so I must bid farewell to your hospitalities."

"I am glad you have spoken first," said the prince, "otherwise you might have thought that I was anxious for you to depart, and rather than that I would put up with any inconvenience."

"I do not understand."

"I will explain in a few words. During the day we have been holding an anxious consultation, and the result of it is that we have determined to quit England together with the least possible loss of time."

"And a very wise determination too," said Tom. "It was the very course of action I was about to recommend you to follow, for, by what I know, I fancy that the guardian has by far the better claim. The only difficulty is her wealth, to which he has no manner of right and title, and therefore he ought not to be permitted to enjoy it."

The prince snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"I care not that much for all the wealth—I have now all that I require."

"In that case, then," said Tom, "let me assure you that you cannot too soon take your departure from England, and, in order that no time be lost, let me now bid you farewell."

The prince seemed much affected at this separation, for short as had been the time during which they had been together, yet it was long enough to enable Tom to win his way to his heart.

It is only natural that the prince should like him, for from his earliest years he had been taught to look upon bravery as the most important of all personal qualifications, and Tom had shown that he possessed more than an ordinary share of that quality.

After the exchange of a few more words, the prince clasped his hands, and upon the appearance of the attendant gave orders for Tom's horse to be immediately got in readiness.

Our friend then descended with him and took his fare-

well of the Indian girl, who was no less affected than Zariel at the prospect of a separation.

His last words to the prince, who followed him to the door of the mansion, were:

"Do not fail to take my advice. I should be glad to know that the happiness of both of you was assured in the future, and it will, I feel confident, if you are left unmolested. Therefore, quit England without loss of time."

"I have made every preparation," was the reply, "and shall take my departure almost immediately. In order that we may travel with all speed, I shall leave nearly the whole of my attendants behind me."

"That is right. Let nothing occur to make you change your determination. If you do, I feel assured that you will rue it."

So saying, Tom descended the steps before the front door and mounted his steed, which was held by a swarthy attendant of the prince's.

Tom's eye sparkled when he saw how well cared for the animal had been.

Never had he seen it look to better advantage.

Never did it seem to manifest so much impatience to be off, and never did it seem more competent to outrun any others that might pursue it.

In a moment Tom was seated in the saddle.

All around him was very still—suspiciously still, he thought.

As he rode slowly away, and got behind the clump of evergreens which we have mentioned as having for a time concealed the approach of the officers, he thoroughly examined all his weapons.

After having satisfied himself that all were in perfect order and in readiness for instant use, he increased his speed.

The massive gate opened at his approach, and closed behind him again with a heavy clang, which seemed to Tom like a harsh note of separation between himself and his new-made friends.

But this fancy was quickly dispelled by the sound of footsteps and the cry of voices.

"There, now!" he heard some one say quite distinctly.

"I told you so—didn't I? Quick—quick! We shall have him after all!"

Tom turned quickly, and caught sight of the police officers who had made so ineffectual a search about the mansion and grounds.

They had concealed themselves behind an abrupt angle formed by the high brick wall which we have already described.

There was a sudden rush while these words were spoken, and then the foremost officer rapidly raised a pistol and discharged it before Tom was aware of his intention.

"My orders are, alive or dead," muttered the officer, as he pulled the trigger, "and I mean to make sure of you. I don't see why one need be so very particular about a d—d highwayman!"

Tom reeled in the saddle.

For a moment he fancied he should fall.

So did the officers, and with loud yells of triumph they came bounding on.

But Tom recovered himself.

Although believing that he was badly hit, yet he determined to show fight to the last.

Rapidly drawing one of his own pistols, he turned round and fired, taking no particular aim except that he marked at the throng of officers.

Then, without waiting to see what, if any, effect was produced by this discharge, he faced his horse round and urged him onward at full speed.

The first thing he wondered at was that he should feel such slight effects from the bullet which had been discharged at him.

It was a mystery, and while galloping along at that terrific pace he resolved to do his best towards elucidating it.

The discovery was quickly made.

The bullet had actually struck against one of the large metal buttons on the front of his coat.

But it had struck obliquely, and had then glanced off, doing him no injury.

The force and suddenness of the blow, however, were such as to cause him to reel in the manner we have stated

This was a most agreeable discovery to make, and Tom heartily congratulated himself upon his good fortune.

Still, the narrow escape he had had from death did not fail to make him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

He was therefore very wise to make the resolution of banishing the thought altogether.

Under such exciting circumstances as the present, it was likely enough that he would succeed.

Glancing back, he saw that the police officers had commenced a pursuit, and if the manner in which they whipped and spurred their horses could be taken as an indication of their intentions, then most assuredly did they intend to strain every nerve to attempt the accomplishment of their purpose.

But Tom only smiled while he observed their efforts. He had got an excellent start already, and was well aware how important a thing that was in a race.

Then, his horse he felt certain could go at a speed which would utterly preclude all hope of any of the officers overtaking him, unless he should be so unfortunate as to meet with some accident.

Tom King accordingly took off his hat and made a very low bow with it, just as he would have done had he been wishing some one good night with an extra amount of politeness.

This act was thoroughly well understood by the officers, and the reader will not need to be told that it would have a most galling effect upon them.

It was well calculated to work up their aggravation to the highest pitch.

Tom King now turned his attention in good earnest to getting away.

Already the night was closing in, and although it wanted several hours of the time when he had appointed to meet his companions, yet he wished to have his actions unfettered without delay, in order that he might make one more attempt to discover the whereabouts of Maud.

Tom's horse galloped on in gallant style.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration whatever to say that for every three yards which the officers' horses made he went six.

Such being the case, it follows as a matter of course that they were ere long left quite behind.

When completely out of sight and hearing, Tom abruptly changed his course, for all this time he had been going in a direction almost opposite to that which he had made up his mind to take.

He did not very greatly relax his speed until he found himself once more in the vicinity of the Jolly Tar Inn.

But he was not so temerarious as to venture too near to it this time.

Working round this building in a circle, Tom sought everywhere for some trace of Maud.

But quite in vain.

Nothing at all could be seen of her.

Yet, despite his non-success, he continued his search perseveringly.

At length the hour of midnight drew near.

"I must give up," he said, "and yet it vexes me extremely to have to do so. I made sure that I was on the right track. I ought to have discovered her—I feel that I ought, and I shall ever blame myself for not having done so. My only hope is that some of my comrades may have been more fortunate than myself, but that, I feel, is a frail, frail hope indeed."

It was therefore in great depression of spirits that Tom slowly made his way to the place of rendezvous.

He reached the blasted tree somewhere about the appointed time.

On his arrival he found all dark and dreary.

He had arrived first.

The wind howled with a dismal sound among the branches of the trees around, and sounded in Tom's ears like a prognostication of coming evil.

Time passed.

Still, save and except for the melancholy wailing of the wind, the silence remained unbroken.

All the while Tom kept his sense of hearing on full stretch.

At last he was rewarded by hearing a welcome sound. It was the clatter of horses' feet.

Hoarser and clearer and more unmistakable became the

sound, and he leaned forward eagerly in the saddle, in the hope of being able to see who it was approaching.

"Three riders," he muttered, as he detected the foot-falls of three horses—"three riders. Who can they be? Am I doomed to a disappointment after all?"

As he asked himself the question, he shrank back as far as he was able into the concealing shadow cast by the gloomy trees.

CHAPTER MXXXV.

RETURNS TO MAUD IN THE MILLER'S COTTAGE.

It is necessary now that we should revert to the proceedings of Maud.

We feel assured that the reader will willingly follow us in a recital of her fortunes, especially as we have left her for so long a space.

We go back, then, to that poverty-stricken cottage, or rather hut, that adjoined the water-mill.

It will be remembered that when Maud learned from the lips of the miller's wife that the time had passed when she ought to have conveyed the warning, she, with a despairing cry, had sprung up from the bed, intending to set out then.

But she had miscalculated her strength, and at once fell down in a swoon.

When she recovered her consciousness, she found herself again upon the bed, and the woman occupied in sprinkling water upon her.

A copious flow of tears now came to her relief.

But sad indeed and full of anxiety was her heart, for she dreaded that Dick and his companions had perished.

Nothing else, save that utter bodily prostration to which she was a prey, could have kept her there inactive.

Anything would have been preferable and better than lying there so helplessly.

And yet after a time, when she grew calmer, she began to ask herself what she should do—where she should go, supposing the use of her limbs had not been denied her?

But she asked these questions vainly.

And so the weary, weary hours passed by.

Her heart ached when the dim gray moonlight found its way into the room, for she was suffering from the worst of all agonies—suspense.

During the day her strength partially returned to her, and beyond doubt her recovery would have been more rapid had the requisite things been at hand; but in that lonesome hut scarcely the bare necessities of life could be obtained.

Still, when night came she was better—so much so that she reappeared herself with but little assistance.

At present she had said not a word to the woman respecting the payment she intended to make for these services; but the truth was, Maud's mind was by far too busily engaged in other matters to think of these, and so the hints and remarks which the woman threw out were passed over unregarded.

Neither did Maud observe on this night that the woman cast upon her threatening looks, and conversed in a low tone with her husband, who did nothing but crouch over the fire in an attitude of sullen indolence.

"John—John!" whispered the woman, for at least the twentieth time that evening.

"Well, well—what do you want?"

"You know what I want."

The man moved uneasily.

"Have you made up your mind?" continued his wife.

"Silence—still!"

"I tell you you are a fool and a coward, John Costard. So you have always been, and so you ever will be, I suppose."

"Hold your row!"

"I sha'n't! I shall talk if I like! I ask you again, have you made up your mind?"

"Hold your row, I say!"

"I sha'n't! You have the chance now, but who knows how long you may have it? Perhaps not more than half an hour. Look!—she seems half inclined to be off now."

The man turned his bloodshot eyes towards Maud with a wolfish gaze.

Not one word of this discourse had reached her ears—or, at any rate, none had penetrated to her understanding.

There could be no mistaking the meaning of that gaze.

It would have had the effect of warning Maud and putting her upon her guard; but she beheld it not.

The glance meant murder.

The word was expressed almost as unmistakably as it had been uttered by the lips.

His wife's instigations had produced a partial effect.

The man had all the inclination to commit the hideous crime, but he lacked the courage to set about it.

But his wife, noticing his irresolution, and perceiving too that some impression had been made, continued with her urgings.

"What are you afraid of, John?" she hissed in his ear—"what do you dread?"

"Suppose she should get away?"

"We must prevent it."

"Why not do the deed yourself?"

"A fine idea, truly! You want the money, do you not? Wouldn't such a sum as that set you up in the world again? Look what rings she has on her fingers, too!"

"I cannot do it."

"But I say you can and shall! You must do it!"

He shook his head and shuddered.

"Who is to know?" urged his wife. "What have you to fear? Surely we can master her easily enough. Not a soul knows of her presence here—no one will know then. You saved her, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Then what difference will it make whether she goes in the old mill-pond now or then?"

"But—but—"

"What now?"

"If you—threw her in—"

"Well—well?"

"The—body—would—would be found."

"No."

"But it would?"

"I say no! We could put her into one of the sacks and tie a weight to it—then who would see her again, I should like to know?"

The man recoiled.

He was not quite so hardened in iniquity as his wife.

"Then—then, she would scream," he urged.

"Nothing of the kind—nothing of the kind! There—take this! Take it, I say! What are you frightened of? That will do the business!"

Not without considerable difficulty, the woman slipped something into her husband's hand.

She stole stealthy glances at Maud all the time, who still ate unconscious of what was going on.

The something thus stealthily conveyed was a knife.

A bright, sharp, cruel-looking weapon, well suited for such a deed as that which they had in contemplation.

The man's cheek blanched as he gazed upon it.

"Now, then," whispered his wife, "what could be more easy? Look where she sits like one in some deep sleep. One stride will take you to her side—one stroke with the knife will—"

"Hush—hush!"

Maud moved and looked up.

She had just then made up her mind that she would, in spite of all hazards, leave the hut and resume her search for Dick.

She fancied that her strength was now adequate to such a task.

But the man at once jumped to the conclusion that she had either overheard what had been passing between his wife and himself, or else that she suspected their design.

How very true it is that a guilty conscience stands in need of no accuser.

He trembled excessively, and it was a thousand wonders that the knife did not fall from his strengthless hand.

"I did not mean it, miss," he said, abjectly—"indeed—indeed I didn't!"

Maud regarded him with unmixed surprise.

"Mean what?" she asked.

"Silence, fool!" said the woman, in a low tone, which,

however, reached Maud's ears—"silence, idiot! Do you want to spoil all?"

Maud wondered what was meant.

Some inward kind of presentiment came over her at this moment.

Without knowing exactly how, she became conscious that she was menaced by danger of some kind or other.

But of what precise nature she could form no accurate idea, so that she felt particularly uneasy.

The looks of the man and his wife by no means pleased her, but she scarcely thought of them, for she intended to leave the place without delay.

At this moment the woman came forward with a great affectation of hypocritical solicitude.

"Don't pay any attention to my husband, miss," she said, in sycophantic tones, which grated terribly on Maud's ears. "He is a good enough man in his way, but a little bit odd at times. Don't take any notice of him, but let me know what you may please to want."

"I want nothing further, thank you," said Maud, quietly. "I am about to take my departure now and I must again and again thank you for the attention you have paid me. It shall not go unrewarded."

Maud placed her hand in her pocket, intending to draw forth her purse.

Of course she would have liberally recompensed these people with its contents.

But the purse was gone.

The woman had taken good care to remove it.

Maud at once stepped back into the adjoining room, fancying she must have left the money there.

"Now, John Costard," hissed the bold, bad woman, "what are you going to do? We have got the money—you know we have. She will find out the robbery in a moment; and just tell me whether you feel ready to go to the gallows, when you have such an easy means of getting out of it? She will scream out, and all the neighbours will hear her. Then, when it is too late, you will wish you had taken my advice."

These last words seemed to work more upon the man than any which had previously been uttered.

His lips moved convulsively, while he grasped the handle of the murderous-looking knife with a savage grip.

"One stroke," cried his wife, urgently—"only one, and then all is over. Mind, there must be no second blow!"

The miller seemed to have made up his mind at last.

It appeared that he could no longer withstand the incitement of his wife.

With stealthy steps he made his way across the rough flooring to the doorway through which Maud had just passed.

But just as he reached it she appeared upon the threshold.

Maud started back, uttering a loud scream of terror.

There was no possibility of mistaking the purpose of those to whom she had been giving so much credit for kindness and charity.

"Too late!" groaned the man.

"No, no!" shrieked his wife. "Forward—forward! If she escapes now we are as good as hanged already! Stop her—stop her, I say!"

Worked up to the highest pitch, the man made a blundering rush forward with the full resolution of putting an end to the matter before he could have time for further reflection.

But Maud eluded him without much trouble, for her movements compared to his were those of a fawn to an elephant.

Nevertheless, she was almost half dead with terror.

In the extremity of her fear, however, she caught sight of an old rusty sword, which was hanging against one of the walls.

To rush towards this spot and to seize the weapon took her so little time that the man seemed stupefied with amazement when he saw the sword in her hand.

Maud grasped it by the hilt, and held it before her in a posture of defence.

Her life was dear not only to herself but to others, and therefore she resolved not to resign it to these murderous wretches without a struggle.

She saw, too, what an arrant coward she had to deal

with, and this inspired her with more courage than she could otherwise have called to her aid.

The threatening attitude which she assumed, and the expression of determination, made the miller shrink back.

Despite of all consequences, he would then and there have abandoned his purpose.

But his instigating wife was still behind him urging him on.

"Kill—kill," she cried—"kill her, or perish your self!"

"Beware!" said Maud. "I know how to use this weapon, and shall have plenty of resolution to enable me to do so to advantage. Come nearer at your peril!"

Even while she spoke, Maud's heart sank within her, for she mentally asked herself what could she do against these two.

Her eyes just then fell upon the door, and she thought in a moment that if she was speedy in her movements she might gain the open air and escape unhurt.

No sooner did the idea occur to her than she proceeded to carry it out.

She made a sudden feint, as though her intention was to rush forward and commence the attack.

The ruse succeeded to perfection.

Uttering a loud yell of fear, the man dropped the knife and endeavoured to interpose his wife between himself and the threatened danger.

Maud flung the sword at the pair with all her strength, and then darted out of the cottage like a flash of light.

When she saw her thus suddenly disappear, the woman's fury knew no bounds.

She was maddened to think she had been deceived by such an artifice.

She soothed her mind a little by bestowing a heavy blow upon her husband.

Then snatching up the knife, she dashed out of the hut.

She just caught a sight of Maud bounding forward in the distance.

This was enough to urge her to the utmost.

The manner in which she now started off in pursuit was astounding.

Maud had fear as an incentive to speed—the woman angry passions.

Poor Maud heard this fury bounding on behind her, and looked back in affright.

Her terror was redoubled when she saw how close behind her her pursuer was.

No sooner did the miller's wife catch sight of her back-turned face than she uttered a frantic cry and brandished the knife above her head.

Faint and sick with dread, Maud endeavoured to increase her speed.

All objects seemed to swim before her, and she was only dimly conscious that she had gained what looked like a well-beaten road.

Her breath came panting from her breast.

She felt each moment as though she should sink.

Indeed, it was a truly wonderful circumstance that she should have been able to maintain such a rapid rate of speed for so long a time.

But her limbs now failed her.

She staggered and nearly fell.

By an almost superhuman effort she recovered herself and continued her headlong course.

But the woman had gained upon her wonderfully.

Maud could hear her heavy footsteps sounding, through the exaggeration of intense fear, like thunder.

She could hear her heavy, labouring breath, and every now and then a half-articulate summons to come to a standstill.

The summons was disregarded, but it was quite evident that Maud's strength would hold out a moment longer.

What she then endured we are unable to convey an adequate conception of.

In imagination she could see the woman behind her with uplifted knife, only waiting for a favourable opportunity to strike.

So impressed was she by this dread that it rendered her oblivious of all things else.

A small twig—it could scarcely be called by any other name—lay directly in her path.

It would have been under ordinary circumstances the

easiest thing in the world to have stepped over it, or gone a little to one side.

But Maud did neither.

She did not even see it; and consequently, before she was aware of it, her feet became entangled, and she fell, face foremost, to the ground.

Consciousness almost left her, but not quite.

The intense horror she had of what was to come prevented her from losing her senses entirely.

But she did not hear the clatter of a horse's hoofs, though the next instant a powerful yet pleasant voice struck upon her ears.

"What hellgame is this, you old witch?" the voice cried. "Be off, or I will be the death of you—be off, I say!"

Then all was still.

The next thing Maud became aware of was an unpleasant stinging sensation.

She opened her eyes and looked up, though she fancied she was about to take her last look of this world.

To her astonishment, and joy as well, she caught sight of some one bending over her with an air of tender interest.

The moon was shining clearly and brightly, lighting up everything with her magic lustre.

The clear, cold beams showed Maud that she was indebted to a stranger for the piece of good fortune she had just received.

Almost in doubt whether what she saw was real, Maud closed her eyes again, but only to open them the next moment.

CHAPTER MXXXVI.

IN WHICH MAUD MAKES A FRESH ACQUAINTANCE, AND ONE WHICH SHE IS DESTINED TO RENEW.

THE form of the stranger was still there.

It needed no more than one glance to show her that he was young and not without good pretensions to being considered handsome.

His face had upon it a pleasant though somewhat reckless expression—and this was more noticeable about the eyes.

He was well formed, and his somewhat picturesque-looking apparel showed off his figure to the utmost advantage.

"I am glad you have recovered," he said, in those peculiar accents which always distinguish those who are in the habit of moving in good society. Then observing that Maud glanced about her in terror, he added: "Be under no apprehensions now. The danger is over—the old hag is gone."

His words afforded wonderful relief to Maud's heart, and now for the first time the tears began to flow.

Young as the stranger was, he must have possessed some knowledge of what was best to be done in such a case, for instead of making the least attempt to check her weeping, he removed to a little distance, under the pretence of seeing whether his horse was properly secured to the branch of the tree to which he had attached the reins.

Thus left to herself, Maud rapidly recovered her composure.

The tears she shed wonderfully relieved her breast, and in a moment or so she made an attempt to rise.

The stranger at once hastened forward and assisted her.

"You are better now, I hope?"

"Yes—yes," answered Maud, with some slight hesitation, for she fancied the stranger had an admiring eye upon her. "My best thanks, sir, are your due, though I cannot express myself."

"Tush—tush!"

"It is in vain for you to attempt generously to under-rate the service which you have rendered me. I am well aware that but for your most timely interposition I should before this have fallen a victim to that woman's fury."

Maud could not avoid shuddering and glancing around her while she spoke.

"She is gone now," the stranger hastened to remark, in reassuring tones. "But did she really mean murder?"

"I fear so."

The stranger looked at once curious and interested.

Maud briefly told him that circumstances had induced

her to take up a temporary abode in Mill Cottage, and the result.

"You have had a fortunate escape," he said; "and I rejoice to think that chance should have led me in this direction."

"I am deeply grateful to you, I assure you, but——"

"No more—no more. Excuse me, but if I am any judge, I should say from your manner that you had some other cause for grief and trouble than even this."

Maud was silent.

"Don't think me intrusive," he continued, "but, if there is anything else I can do to save you, you have only to name it, and I am quite at your disposal."

"Thanks—many thanks," said Maud, speaking with difficulty through her tears. "It may sound ungrateful, and yet the only favour I can ask you is to leave."

"And it is the one that I should grant with the most difficulty. But, however, if you persist——"

"It must be so! Do not be offended, but——"

"Why do you pause? What would you say?"

"Simply leave me!"

"Enough."

The stranger took off his hat, and made a bow that was full of grace.

"Farewell, since you will have it so, but, take my word for it, these roads are by no means safe for a woman to travel alone and unprotected, so, if you are going far——"

"I am not afraid," Maud answered. "But do not press me further, I am distracted."

"I can see that you are much troubled, and that is why I urge you thus. Under other circumstances, rely upon it I should not do so."

"I appreciate your kind intent, and believe me when I say that I feel deeply grateful; but still I must renew my request."

"You are strangely persistent, and must have some strong reason for being so, I make no doubt. Since you will have it so, once more farewell."

This time he not only bowed, but went to the spot where he had left his horse, unfasted the noble animal from the bough, and with one bound vaulted clean into the saddle.

But he did not so readily take his departure.

"It is not yet too late," he said. "Forgive me for being thus urgent, but I feel that I ought not to leave you thus. Let that be my apology."

"No apology is needed, sir," answered Maud, who could not feel offended at the manifestation of so much interest in her behalf, for she was judge enough of human nature to feel certain that it was well-intentioned.

"And you are still resolved to go alone?"

"I am."

"Once more good night, then. Let me say, however, that I feel more than a common interest in this encounter. Why I should do so I know not. There is, too, a presentiment upon my mind to the effect that we shall meet again—that we are destined to become much better acquainted with each other. However, this will be proved by time."

While speaking these words, he turned his horse round and, reiterating the word "Farewell!" rode slowly away, as though in the expectation that at this, the last moment, Maud would call to him to come back.

Ere he had gone much more than a dozen paces he stopped again.

"I forgot to mention," he added, "that my name is Hawk—commonly known as Captain Hawk; and if ever you find yourself in any great distress, you can hear of me at the old inn about a mile further along the road—the Horns they call it. Speak to the landlord—he will tell you all about me, and if what you want lies within the power of mortal man to accomplish, I will do it. Now, for the last time, farewell!"

Having made this singular speech, the stranger—or Captain Hawk, as we may as well call him, since he had given himself that designation—struck spurs to his steed, and galloped off.

As may be supposed, his last words took Maud quite by surprise, and as she watched his retreating form she murmured to herself:

"Captain Hawk, and the old Horns Inn upon this road. I will not forget that. I like him, for he seems bold and generous. He has a face, too, which would command

trust and confidence in any breast. I may require his aid—Heaven knows!—and I ought not to despise it, for where—where am I to look for a friend?"

This question brought Maud back to a full sense of her present wretched, desolate position.

Wringing her hands, she burst out into a violent fit of sobbing and weeping.

The paroxysm lasted for some time; but of course, eventually it expended itself, and she began to think a little more calmly about her position and prospects.

"Where am I now?" she asked herself, as she glanced around at all the objects about her now beautifully revealed by the moon's rays.

She had not, of course, the least idea of her whereabouts.

Everything she looked at was fresh and strange to her.

She wrung her hands again, and once more her tears poured forth.

She began to be sensible that she ought not so readily to have refused the stranger's offer of assistance, for at each moment she began to be more and more sensible of the difficulties by which she was environed, and from which she was not able to see the way to an extrication.

"What shall be my first step?" she murmured, half aloud. "Alas! I fear that all my efforts will be of no avail! Too late—too late! Dick and the rest are, beyond doubt, by this time either slain, or else prisoners in the hands of the police, and it is my fault—all my fault! I ought to have warned them, and failed to do so!"

Maud was scarcely right in thus taking all the blame to herself, and yet she did so.

"But it is suspense that I suffer now," she continued; "and what can be worse than that? Nothing—nothing! It would be better far if I was able to comprehend the full extent of my misfortunes, for how do I know whether Dick is alive or dead?"

Tears again choked her utterance, and this time she seemed to abandon herself to her grief more than she had done on any former occasion.

As before, however, the violence of her grief abated.

"I must and will know the worst! I will set about that at once! That shall be my course!"

As she made this resolution she dried her tears, and plucked up what resolution she was able.

But another difficulty presented itself to her, and the readiness with which it started into her mind only serves to show how thickly she was beset by them.

No matter which way she turned, one sprung up before her.

She had determined to discover what had befallen Dick and his comrades.

But how was she to do it?

In vain she endeavoured to frame some reply to this pertinent question.

She knew not which way to turn.

Once she thought of making her way towards London, where, as she knew full well, she should quickly learn what had happened.

But she had not the remotest notion of which way to take in order to reach the metropolis.

There was not one thing she knew to guide her.

Then she thought perhaps something could be learned at the ruined castle.

But here again the same difficulty confronted her.

She knew the way there no better than to London.

Upon consideration, however, she believed she could find her way back to this place, and then, if her inquiries here proved futile, she could but go on to the metropolis.

Scarcely, however, had she reached this point in her deliberations than she heard the sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs.

She was well enough experienced in such sounds to know that it was a single horseman who was approaching.

Not wishing to be seen, she drew back to one side of the road, where an umbrageous tree cast a deep shadow.

This position had not been occupied many seconds before Maud, to her great surprise, saw her protector come in view.

"Why—why," she said, "surely that is Captain Hawk! What can bring him back this way?"

It would seem strange he should thus have altered his direction.

Maud looked again, fancying some accidental resemblance had misled her.

But no.

The moon, which was shining so brightly, poured over full light upon him as he advanced, and made anything like difficulty of identification impossible.

Maud's immediate thought now was that it might be able to direct her to the ruined castle.

Should she ask him?

There was no time to deliberate.

She made up her mind to do so, for it was hard to say how long it would be before she had another opportunity.

Acting upon this decision, she stepped out of the shadow on to a spot where the moon's rays fell undimmed.

Captain Hawk saw her immediately.

She knew it, for the ejaculation to which he gave utterance was carried to her ears.

He pulled up with great abruptness, and the manner in which his steed rose upon his haunches, in his endeavour to check his speed, told Maud how swiftly he had been coming on.

"One word," she said—"only one!"

He did not reply, but simply held up his hand as though he would have commanded silence.

At the same time he turned his ear in the direction from which he had just come, and listened intently for several seconds.

Seeing him do so thrilled Maud strangely.

It was an action she had seen Dick perform hundreds of times.

"I can spare a moment or so," he said, patting his panting steed; "but, you see, urgent business has compelled me to ride swiftly back to-night. However, as I said, I am now and ever at your service. Command me!"

"Many thanks," said Maud; "but the favour I require will scarcely detain you a second."

"Speak—speak!" he said. "Speak freely."

Then, in an altered tone, he exclaimed:

"Quiet, Satan—quiet, I say! Stand still, Satan! Woe, old boy!"

These last words were addressed to his horse, which Maud noticed now more particularly than she had yet done.

It was of a magnificent jetty black—truly, a beautiful creature—such a piece of horseflesh as one rarely sees in a whole lifetime.

No briefer or more fitting description could be found than that given by Shakspeare of the steed of Adon's:—

"Round hoof'd, short jointed, fetlocks shag and long,

Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,

High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,

Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide,

And what a horse should have he did not lack."

As she gazed upon him, Maud's thought was, that if a steed or mate for Black Bess was anywhere to be found it certainly stood before her.

But she had not then a very good opportunity of observing him closely, for she could tell, in spite of the rider's manner, that he was most anxious to be off.

What struck Maud most was the strange name which had been given to the steed, and under any less pressing circumstances she would certainly have asked what had led to his receiving so unusual a designation.

As it was, however, she contented herself merely with inquiring the way to the ruins.

"Comynge Castle?" repeated the stranger, slowly. "I have heard the name somewhere, but I cannot remember where."

He observed the look of disappointment which clouded Maud's face, and asked:

"Can you describe the place? I may know it well by sight if not by name."

As well as she was able, Maud gave a description of it.

"Yes—yes, I know now. And it puzzles me how I forgot. Why, you have but to keep straight on the way I have just come, till you reach the top of a steep hill.

Then, if you look over the fields to the left, you will see the gray walls plainly enough in the moonlight. Ha! I hear them now," he broke in, abruptly. "They still keep at me. If I am not quick," he added, addressing Maud, "my friends will overtake me. Good-night. We shall meet again."

Without waiting for her to utter a syllable, he let the reins fall upon his impatient courser's neck.

No other impulse forward was needful.

Away he flew almost with the speed of an arrow newly discharged from a bow.

A bend in the road quickly took both horse and rider from Maud's sight.

Strange thoughts were passing through her brain.

What to think of her new acquaintance she scarcely knew. It was evident, however, that he was no ordinary individual.

Further reflection was at this moment cut short, for the sound which now reached Maud's ears was such as to fill her mind with the liveliest apprehension.

It was that produced by the hoofbeats of a number of horses—a dozen at the least.

Maud, had she been asked, could not have told why she felt alarmed, nor why she felt impelled to break her way through a narrow gap in the hedge and crouch down, trembling, out of sight.

She had not taken up her quarters here very long before the horsemen whose approach she had heard came in sight.

Maud could see them plainly through the interstices near the roots of the hedgerow.

Upon catching sight of them, she had to compress her lips very tightly to suppress a scream.

Then she crouched down—lower—lower down, though this was needless, for there was scarcely a possibility that she could be seen.

The riders were police officers, every one of them.

They were all well mounted and well armed.

They were lashing and spurring their steeds most unmercifully, and dashed by Maud's place of concealment like a whirlwind.

There was a jingling of accoutrements—

A cloud of dust.

Then they swept round the corner we have already mentioned.

But it was not until long after the heavy clatter of their horses' feet had died away that Maud ventured to look up.

Even then she trembled so excessively that she was scarcely able to rise to her feet.

The danger, however, was over, and when once assured of it Maud thought of her determination, and forced her way into the high-road again.

It was not more certain that they were police officers who had dashed by than it was that they were in pursuit of the so-called Captain Hawk.

But why?

Maud, of course, was not in a position to return any definite answer to this question, and, moreover, her own affairs now pressed too much upon her mind to allow her to reflect upon any foreign subject.

At the same time, she could not help acknowledging to herself that she fully shared in the presentiment that they were destined to become much better acquainted with each other.

The dread she was in about the officers who had passed by lent great speed to her feet, so that she reached the summit of the hill Captain Hawk had mentioned in much less time than she would have done under ordinary circumstances.

Panting and tired, she stood upon this piece of elevated ground, and strained her eyes in the endeavour to catch sight of that well-known place, which almost seemed to her like a home from the length of time she had sojourned there.

The sight of it seemed to have the effect of restoring her falling energies.

Now that her destination was in sight, she seemed all at once to become possessed of the requisite vigour to reach it.

That she should be so near to the ruins seems very strange. Such, however, was the fact, and it only serves to show how much she must have doubled upon her course.

The descent of the hill was accomplished without much difficulty, and then Maud had the boldness to strike off across the meadows, keeping her eyes fixed upon the tall keep of the castle, which, from its great height, formed a conspicuous object in the landscape.

But as she wearily walked on, she found that the distance she had to go was much greater than it had appeared to be.

To her it seemed that as she advanced so did the ruins retreat, thus mocking all her efforts to reach them.

More than once she was glad enough to sink down and rest her weary limbs.

Nothing but the strong, all-powerful desire to ascertain if possible the fate of her husband and his companions could have kept her up.

But the longest and most tedious journey must come to an end at last.

After the lapse, then, of a long, long time—so long that Maud was unable to form a clear idea of its duration—the outer portion of the ruined castle was gained.

Maud's heart now beat so fast as almost to prevent her breathing.

Indeed, she believed nothing could save her from swooning.

Urged by that all-conquering desire, she feebly struggled on.

The old castle had a spectral, ghastly look, as the moon poured her flood of light upon its gray and crumbling walls.

A most oppressive silence, too, reigned around—a silence which Maud thought was horribly suggestive of the tomb, and most disastrous to the hopes in which she had indulged.

It was when she had fathomed the very lowest depths of despair that she heard a voice give vent to a glad cry.

"Maud—Maud—Maud!" said a well-known voice. "It is I! I am here—I am here!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ARE SURPRISED BY THE OFFICERS IN THE RUINS.

HAD not these words been followed by the sound of rapid footsteps, and had she not caught sight of a well-known form hastening towards her, Maud would have concluded that she had been the victim of some cruel delusion.

Fortunately, she was spared this pang additional to those which she had already suffered.

But her joy had almost as great an effect upon her as a shock of grief or disappointment.

The next moment she found herself in the arms of the one she loved so truly and so well.

So exhausted was she bodily, and so completely overcome mentally, that for some time she could do nothing more than remain half passive in Dick's arms.

While remaining thus, and only in a state of semi-consciousness, the past, and all the horrors she had gone through, seemed by far more like some hideous dream than stern reality.

Was she waking then, she asked herself, or was she dreaming now?

The last question there was difficulty in making a reply to.

All—all was real.

But by what chance could it be, she again mentally inquired, that Dick was there, to all appearances safe and unhurt—just in the very place she had set out from in order expressly to warn him from approaching, and where—greatest mystery of all—he was, beyond all doubt, quite secure and safe?

Such interrogations as these thronging thickly in her mind might well confuse Maud's brain, and make her close her eyes in an attempt to think calmly and clearly.

"Rouse up—arouse yourself!" she heard Dick say, for he fancied, from her closed eyes and pallid cheeks, that she had fainted. "You are in no danger now, and—and you are not hurt, I trust?"

Dick pronounced these words with considerable diffidence.

The first tumult of joy which he experienced when he

first caught sight of her had made him forgetful of such a contingency as this.

Now that the idea had occurred to him, however, he suffered a thousand apprehensions, for he sadly feared by Maud's manner that she had suffered some fearful accident.

"No—no," she murmured, feebly, "I shall be better soon. Water—water!"

"Tom," said Dick, in a loud voice—"Tom!"

Tom Davis came forward.

'Here I am, captain. What's amiss?"

Some water, now, at once!"

Tom started off at full speed.

There was a plentiful supply of clear spring water in the ruins, which had been of the greatest service to the highwaymen during their sojourn there, and Davis made his way to it at once.

He quickly returned.

Maud drank a little of the water—but very little.

The remainder Dick sprinkled in her face.

After this, she was considerably revived.

"Is it possible," she asked—"can it be possible that you are here safe and unhurt?"

"Quite. And you?"

"Not much hurt. But never mind now—tell me about yourself?"

"Nay—nay! I must first be satisfied——"

"Take my word for it," she said; "all is well."

"But where have you been? and where is Jack?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Do not weep—but speak; tell me—relieve me from the terrible suspense which I now endure!"

"I discovered the presence of the officers here, and knew they intended to wait in ambush till you had descended——"

"Yes—yes—I know all that!"

"You know it?"

"Certainly."

"Then my curiosity is greater than yours. How have you escaped?"

"I will tell you, but I must hear about your proceedings first. No hesitation—your curiosity will be most speedily allayed by a prompt compliance, for in this case I will take no denial."

Maud knew very well that when Turpin had once expressed himself positively on any occasion it was quite futile to induce him to change his mind, so she at once began the recital of those events which are already well known to the reader.

It may perhaps be imagined with what amount of astonishment and dismay Dick listened to her narrative.

When she had concluded, he drew a long breath, and said:

"Thank Heaven that is over, and that I have heard the last of these perils! I had imagined, as I thought, the worst of evils, but never dreamt of such a succession of calamities as I have heard."

But Maud's impatience was so great that she could scarcely listen to these few remarks, but eagerly she sought him to let her know by what means he had managed to escape his foes.

Dick finished with these words:

"I felt convinced," he said, "but I know not why, that I should find you somewhere near the ruins, and hence my presence here to-night. My fear was, however, that you had fallen into the power of the officers."

"No—no, I should have warned you, had I been able."

"I find so! Tom King was nearly right in his guess, but a kind of fascination seemed to draw me to this place. There was peril and hazard in approaching here, but I was careful."

"Have the officers departed?"

"Yes, they have gone. I was in time to see the men depart who had been left in charge. It seems every part of the ruins has undergone a rigid scrutiny, and from what I overheard——"

"Overheard?"

"Yes; on first reaching here, upon finding the men were present, I crept as close to them as I could, in the hope of hearing something about you."

"I understand."

"I gathered from their conversation that a large amount of money had been discovered, buried near the spot where we remained so long."



[BLACK BESS LEAPS THE WALL.]

"The secret chamber."

"Yes, that was the spot. The amount is great. Upon hearing of it I could not help thinking of your long-expressed wish——"

"Yes—yes."

"Of leaving England."

Maud sighed deeply.

"That would have furnished us with sufficient to have lived on in some foreign land, for there are times when this wild life palls upon me, and most of all has it done so during your disappearance."

No words can tell what an amount of joy those words infused into Maud's breast.

She flattered herself with the idea that she could now see something like a prospect of the realisation of the dearest wish of her heart.

Oh, if she could only keep Dick in his present humour,
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she fancied there would soon be an end of all those perilous accidents which they had suffered!

To Maud, the prospect of a residence in some other land, where they would have nothing more to fear from the power of the law, was like the anticipation of a calm, safe harbour and the charms of home to some far-out-at-sea and storm-tossed mariner.

There was rest, peace, happiness, and safety, to look forward to.

"It would yet be possible, I think," she said, after a few moments' pause, for at first she was too much overcome to utter a syllable. "Believe me, it is my one wish, the great desire I wish to have gratified. Oh, if you only knew what happiness it would bring to my weary heart you would not deny me!"

"I feel that I ought not," said Dick. "You have already made by far too many sacrifices on my behalf. I

will promise you to take into full consideration all your charge, and the next time we all meet together the subject shall be fully discussed. If it is practicable it can be done."

Maud was quite contented with this promise. She knew full well that it was not lightly made.

She wept plentifully.

"Dry your tears," said Dick, "or I shall change my mind. I want to see smiles, not tears."

"They are tears of joy, Dick," she sobbed. "I shall be calm soon."

At length Maud looked up, and said, quietly:

"Where was it that you appointed to meet the rest?"

"Not far from here; and as soon as you have recovered yourself we will set out, for the time now is overpast."

"I am ready."

"And what will be your next step?"

"That I scarcely know. For one thing, however, I shall propose that for the present we once more take up our quarters in the ruins."

"In the ruins?" asked Maud, scarcely able to believe that she had heard aright.

"Yes."

"But you forget the police officers."

"Indeed I do not, nor those who have been set here to guard the place; but I have certain knowledge that the guard will be no longer kept. The officers will never suspect we have had the audacity to come back, and in all probability the old castle will be more left to itself than it has ever been."

The moment Dick made this remark, Maud was much struck by the force of it.

What more unlikely place could there now be than this for them to be concealed in? She would never have guessed, and she felt certain the officers would not be cunning enough to do so.

"You are right," she said. "At first, the audacity of the proposal staggered me—"

"That is just what I rely upon for success," answered Turpin; "the bold course is always the best."

"And then what will be your next step?"

"We will reserve the consideration of that until we all meet again; we shall then have many important things to arrange and settle."

It was at this moment that Tom Davis came running towards them with the utmost consternation in his looks.

"Captain—captain!" he gasped.

"Well, what now?"

"Up—up! Be quick, or you will be too late! Follow me!"

"What is the matter?"

"We must have been watched to this place."

"Watched?"

"Yes, or else Maud, for a large troop of officers have crept cautiously up to the castle walls. I did not discover their presence until almost upon them. Quick—quick, or we shall be too late to escape, for they intend to surround the castle, and in such a manner as to prevent all possibility of exit from its walls, and we must be off before the circle is completed."

This was startling intelligence indeed, and it came upon both Maud and Dick with more than usual force, for they had only just reasoned themselves into the comfortable belief that they were perfectly safe in their present quarters.

Indeed, for at least a second Dick was quite incredulous.

"You needn't stare like that, captain," cried Davis—"It's true. Come, come, we must be into the saddle at once!"

Recovering himself from his shock of surprise, Dick hastened after his faithfully.

Maud was greatly alarmed at this intelligence, and, what was more, she was much angered with herself.

She believed that the police officers must have tracked her to the ruins, and she much blamed herself for having approached with so little caution.

She well remembered that from the moment she commenced the descent of the hill, from the summit of which she had caught the first glimpse of the castle, she had never once turned her head to look behind her.

The fact was, the state of excitement under which she laboured was by far too great for her to think of any of these things.

Now she blamed herself for her remissness.

When the first shock of surprise was over with her she hastened to follow Dick, for she seemed in a moment to realise the importance of immediate flight.

The distance to the place where the horses had been left was not great, and the reader may rest assured that no time was lost in mounting.

Tom Davis had been so fortunate as to provide himself with a horse, and Turpin wished that another could have been found for Maud, as in that case all their future operations would have been rendered much easier and agreeable.

It was a deficiency which Dick, at the moment when he swung Maud on to the front of the saddle before him, determined should be supplied at the earliest moment.

There could now no longer be any doubt as to the correctness of the information which Tom Davis had given; and had there been any lingering spark of incredulity in Turpin's mind it must have been quenched by what he next beheld.

A number of well-armed police officers came into sight.

No sooner did they catch sight of the little party of our friends than they gave utterance to a loud shout, which certainly seemed more like one of intense surprise than ought also.

But this surprise they rapidly recovered themselves from, and rushed forward intent upon an attack.

Dick, however, was in no humour for an encounter.

But he was in readiness to start.

He merely called out to Tom.

"Forward," he cried—"forward at your best speed!"

He set Black Bess in motion as he thus spoke.

The gallant animal then, as on many a previous occasion, made no account whatever of her double burden.

Tom Davis was well mounted, so he kept behind Dick without much trouble, for of course in that confined area Black Bess could not put out any extraordinary speed.

The officers immediately commenced a pursuit; but what troubled Dick more than this was the fact that one of them placed a small whistle to his lips, which he sounded so shrilly that all the ruins echoed and re-echoed, and as certainly no one but a boatswain could have piped better.

This was a signal which doubtless would be well understood by the other police officers at hand.

"Forward!" said Dick again. "The sharper we are in our movements the better it will be for us."

"Go on, captain," said Tom. "I will keep close enough behind you, never fear."

At this moment Dick turned the angle of a bastion, and the very instant that he did so he became conscious that he had just committed a very unfortunate action.

He had run full tilt upon another party of officers.

They joined at once in full cry.

But Dick dashed on.

In spite of being thus taken at unawares, he knew as if by intuition that the only chance he had lay in keeping on.

Straight in his path, however, was an old stone wall.

The height was enough to make every prudent horseman pause and consider well before he made the attempt to put his horse to overleap it.

The officers uttered shouts of triumph, and began to close round in a kind of circle, thinking, no doubt, that this wall would prove a barrier to the highwayman's further progress, especially as his steed carried a double burden.

But Dick held on steadily.

"Over, Bess, old lass!" he cried, in an inspiring voice, when within a short distance of the truly formidable obstacle.

That was the only incitement she required.

But it was observable that the noble creature gathered herself together, so to speak, and prepared to make a more than ordinary effort.

Up she rose in the air, almost as though without any muscular exertion on her part, or as though she had been suddenly raised by some supernatural and invisible power.

For a fleeting portion of time she was seen clearly above the obstacle, and then, in the twinkling of an eye afterwards, she alighted safely and gently on the other side.

This was a sight which could not fail to excite some emotions of admiration in every breast, but the feeling by which the officers were actuated was far more like aggravation than aught else.

One of those in command of the rest no sooner saw Black Bess rise from the ground than he made sure the wall would be cleared easily, in which he was proved to be right.

He gave vent to a cry of rage and disappointment.

At the same time he rushed forward.

He held a cocked and loaded pistol in his extended hand.

His cry seemed to be taken by some more of his followers as a signal to rush forward as well, but perhaps they were only influenced by mere example.

Be it how it may, they advanced, and had any immediate effect followed the shot which their leader now fired, they would have been in readiness to act.

The pistol which, without any note of warning, had been discharged at the fugitives just as they were clearing the wall was not to all appearances, of any good whatever.

The fury of the officer was on the increase rather than otherwise, for he flung the discharged pistol over the wall with the full fury of his arm.

But despite the vigour with which the missile was hurled, it fell harmlessly upon the long rank grass, for Dick was by this time far ahead.

Not once had he paused, but had kept all his energies bent upon the execution of one task—that of getting quite clear from the ruins of the castle in the shortest possible space of time.

CHAPTER MXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN IS WITNESS OF A VERY EXCITING INCIDENT.

"ARE you hurt, Maud?" was, however, Dick's first anxious question after the report of the pistol had died away.

"No. Are you?"

"I am whole and sound."

"And Bess?"

"Whole and sound too, to the very best of my belief. I heard the bullet whiz above me. We must have begun to descend just when he pulled the trigger."

Maud shuddered.

Such narrow escapes as these—escapes which might literally be called miraculous—were truly terrible.

The horse which Tom Davis bestrode displayed his qualities to good advantage on this occasion.

The wall was surmounted with tolerable ease, and he was able to keep at the heels of Black Bess without Dick having to keep much check upon the rein.

It became evident though that the officers did not intend to let them off any more easily than they could help, for they at once organised a pursuit which, in all fairness, must be said to have commenced with really military alertness.

But our friends had the start, and there was every probability that, provided no remarkable and unforeseen accident occurred, they would succeed in keeping it.

A chase, nevertheless, is proverbially a very doubtful matter.

Like a race, it is sometimes neither the swiftest, nor the best that wins.

"Tom," said Dick, in a loud voice, so that there should be no fear about his words being misunderstood, "just let me see what speed you can make—push on to the best of your ability. Never fear that I shall be left behind."

Tom Davis immediately complied, and the advantage of this method or procedure soon made itself manifest, for it prevented Dick from unduly checking his own mare's speed in order to render it accordant with that of his companion's.

On came the officers, however, with remarkable vigour and spirit.

All at once there was a kind of consternation in the rear, and not one of our friends could resist the temptation of looking back in order to ascertain by what it was occasioned.

The moon still continued to shine with a brilliancy which enabled them to distinguish objects at a considerable distance.

Behind them, and distinctly visible in consequence of the position which it occupied, was the old castle.

Not far from the outer walls they immediately caught sight of what had certainly distracted the attention of the pursuing officers.

This was nothing more nor less than a man mounted upon a magnificent black steed, which seemed to fly over the ground with the speed and grace of an antelope.

The horseman sat in the saddle with the unmistakable ease of one who has perfectly mastered the by no means easy science of riding.

In fact, as he bounded on at this tremendous pace it might be said of him that—

"He grew unto his seat,

And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,

As he had been incorporated and demi-natured

With the brave beast."

Almost immediately afterwards a small troop of police officers emerged from behind a clump of trees.

They were most certainly in full pursuit.

On they went with full hue and cry.

So excited was Dick by this singular spectacle that he totally forgot all about the peril in which he himself stood.

His curiosity was raised to the utmost pitch.

The rider was a total stranger to him, and Dick was confident he could never have so much as glanced at that magnificent horse and have forgotten him.

The course taken by this flying horseman served to bring him each moment more distinctly to the view of our friends.

From the first Maud had watched him with the closest attention, and now she exclaimed:

"Yes, yes—I am certain I am right—it can be no other."

These words served to bring Dick back to a recollection of what was passing around him at the present moment.

"Who—who?" he asked, quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I am certain that is the stranger of whom I spoke."

"That flying horseman?"

"Yes—Captain Hawk."

"Captain Hawk!" repeated Dick, musingly, as though he had a kind of half recollection that he had somewhere heard that name before.

"Yes. Look now! Did you ever see such a noble steed?"

"Never but one," answered Dick.

He patted Black Bess upon the neck while he spoke.

The pace at which Captain Hawk was going was something extraordinary.

And now a rather singular event took place.

That small knot of police officers who were in pursuit of Captain Hawk stood not the remotest chance of overtaking him.

He went two steps to their one.

The distance between them, therefore, could be seen to increase visibly every moment.

By the manner in which the captain pushed on it would seem as though he had decided upon the policy of having a sharp push and getting the pursuit over with as little delay as possible.

The course he took, however, was such as to cause him to approach in a diagonal direction on the large troop of officers who were in pursuit of Turpin.

Of this the captain must have been ignorant.

It would never occur to him that two parties of officers were out, and owing to the nature of his position it was scarcely possible that he could perceive them.

The troop of police officers seemed aware of this, and also to arrive at the conclusion that the capture of Dick was a very doubtful matter, while that of Captain Hawk seemed certain, for if he held on he would dash right into them.

On came Satan in that tremendous style which could not fail to rivet the attention of every beholder.

The officers came to a halt.

No doubt it was galling to give Dick up in this manner, but they were resolved to make a prisoner somehow.

It may seem strange that they did not divide their force, but then it must be considered that if they had

alone this Captain Hawk would have seen them in time.

Dick was not a little surprised at this sudden change in the behaviour of the officers, but he was not long in comprehending their tactics.

What greatly astonished him was that they should abandon a pursuit of him in favour of somebody else.

Previously to that moment he had the vanity to suppose that he was of more importance to them than anyone else.

Their conduct on the present occasion served to show, however, that this was a mistake.

As may be supposed, Dick's curiosity respecting this Captain Hawk greatly increased.

Who could he be?

What had he done that the police officers should be so exceedingly solicitous about his capture?

These were the questions which Dick asked himself, but without being able to give an answer, though he was vaguely conscious of having heard his name mentioned by some one.

Beyond this his memory did not serve him.

"Dick—Dick!" cried Maud, who was attentively watching all that was going on—"Dick, he does not see them. He is riding to his death."

"He is indeed!"

Dick had also brought his mare to a standstill, and so had Tom, now that the officers were no longer in pursuit.

Clearly, however, so far as their own safety was concerned, they ought to have made the best of their speed away.

Dick could not tear himself from the spot, so extreme was his interest.

"Can you not save him?" asked Maud, with deep anxiety.

"I have every wish to do so, but I fear it is an impossibility."

"But you cannot see him perish before our eyes! Remember, he was kind and generous enough to render me a service!"

"Do not fear I should forget it. But what can I do against so many?"

Maud sighed.

"I'll tell you what you might do," said Tom. "You might attract his attention to us, and then perhaps we could by signals apprise him of the danger with which he was threatened."

"A very good suggestion, Tom. A pistol will do it, I fancy."

"Beyond a doubt it will."

"Here goes, then."

Executing the action to the word, Dick drew forth one of his pistols.

He pointed it upwards and pulled the trigger.

The sharp discharge which followed rang out clearly over hill and dale.

It attracted the immediate attention of Captain Hawk, for to him such a sound could bode nothing but danger.

When once the captain looked towards our friends they came forward and took up such positions as would render them more easily to be seen.

When this was done, they waved their arms and pointed to the spot where the officers had—if we may be allowed the term—ambushed themselves.

Captain Hawk was indisputably quick of apprehension.

He might not have known just why Dick and Tom Davis pointed, but he guessed that danger lay in that direction, and abruptly changed his course to one that lay nearly at right angles to it.

With a politeness that seemed to form part of his nature, he did not thus turn aside until he had acknowledged, by a graceful wave of his hat, the good service Dick had rendered him.

Not for long, however, was he in ignorance of what kind of danger he had been threatened with.

The discovery that their intended prey had been warned, filled the officers with ungovernable fury.

They could restrain themselves no longer.

Uttering loud yells and shouts, they rushed forth from their concealment.

"Divide—divide!" cried the leader. "Divide, I say!"

This vague order was productive of a little confusion,

and yet in a short space of time the officers, now forming two parties, were in full chase.

It would have been a very great satisfaction to Dick could he but have seen how the captain further fared.

It was important, however, that he should see to his own safety.

It was less than a moment various intervening objects hid him from view.

The brief pause that had so strangely taken place was productive of one good effect.

It had enabled Black Bess thoroughly to recover her wind and strength, for, of course, it was a very different thing for her to carry a double burden at such a rapid rate instead of a single one.

It was, therefore, with renewed vigour and spirit that she set forward for the second time.

The same arrangement was adopted as before—that is to say, Tom Davis rode on first at the best speed his horse could make, while Dick followed at his heels.

From time to time, however, Maud looked across the country whenever she had the opportunity, in the hope of again catching sight of Captain Hawk, but all trace of him appeared now to be lost.

With uniform steadiness Dick found that he was increasing his distance from the officers, so that unless they were reinforced by fresh horses, or in case an accident occurred to our friends, it was almost impossible a capture should be effected.

It was just about half an hour after this that Dick called out to Tom Davis to come to a halt, and at the same time tightened his rein.

He chose an elevated piece of ground for doing this.

Some time had elapsed since he had seen or even heard anything of the police officers, and he was anxious to ascertain if he could whether or not they had abandoned the chase.

Having pulled up, then, he looked back.

He was agreeably surprised to find that his position commanded a much more extensive view of the surrounding scenery than he had expected, though the moon, having now declined towards the west, no longer poured forth her light with such effulgence as hitherto.

Still he could see tolerably well.

He continued his scrutiny for some moments, but without being able to catch a glimpse of his foes.

"I believe I may venture to say all is well. I can see nothing of them."

"Nor I," answered Tom, "nor hear either."

"Then in that case I think we may venture to direct our course to our destination, which I had hoped to reach long ere this."

He was about to urge Black Bess forward, when Tom cried, somewhat suddenly:

"I can hear something now, captain."

"Hear what?"

"Listen!"

Dick did so.

"A single horseman?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Well, he cannot concern us. Forward once more!"

Tom did not offer to show the least hesitation, but set his horse in motion at once.

Now, it is rather singular that both should have fallen into an error concerning the sound they heard.

As to its character there could be no mistake—most certainly a single horseman was approaching.

But without saying so to each other, and without pausing to consider carefully, both Turpin and Tom Davis came to the conclusion that this horseman was on the road behind them.

They had not gone very far before they became aware that just the opposite was the case.

The horseman was on the road before them, and, what was more, he was approaching them, and that, too, at no common rate of speed.

They all became conscious of this at the same instant, but Maud was the first to remark upon it.

"It is some one approaching us," she said.

"Yes, clearly so," answered Dick, "though I thought otherwise."

"What shall we do, captain?" asked Davis.

"Ride on," replied Turpin. "I see no reason why we should trouble ourselves to go out of our way for any chance passenger, and we are late enough already."

"He may pass without taking any notice of us, captain."

"He is most likely to do so."

"Push on, then—we will pass him rapidly."

Just at this moment they reached a spot where the road bent round at a somewhat acute angle, and afterwards stretched out for a great distance in a perfectly straight line.

They then caught sight of the horseman, and Maud uttered a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" Dick asked, anxiously.

"Nothing—nothing—but—but—yes—yes—I am sure it must be!"

"What—what?"

"Captain Hawk!"

Maud pointed at the horseman as she pronounced the name.

He seemed to be coming on more swiftly than ever.

"I do believe it is," said Dick.

"I am certain of it," answered Maud.

"But by what means short of magic can he have got here?"

"I know not, but he seems to haunt us like a shadow."

"He does indeed. Who he can be puzzles me, and why he should be so fond of riding into the very mouth of danger is something which passes my comprehension."

"How furiously he comes now!"

"Yes; we will stand aside and allow him free passage, otherwise he may do us a mischief."

Considering the undiminished rate at which this eccentric being was coming on, it certainly seemed no more than wise to adopt this precaution.

Very much to the astonishment of all three of our friends, however, they had no sooner made this change than they perceived him slacken speed.

He was drawing the rein very tightly.

The horse was such a powerful-looking creature that it seemed strange for a slim, slight figure like that of Captain Hawk to possess such absolute control over him.

The noble animal, however, despite his tricksiness, was perfectly obedient to the rein.

"What on earth can he be pulling up for?" asked Dick.

This proceeding was quite as singular as any of his others, and only in accordance with that eccentricity which seemed to govern all his actions.

Dick wondered whether he had caught sight of Maud and himself.

This was a point about which they were destined not to wait for a very long time in doubt.

The captain halted within half a dozen paces of where they stood.

"Excuse me," he said, as he removed his hat from his head and made a bow. "It is odd to introduce oneself thus, but I am not altogether a stranger, since I had the pleasure of rendering that young lady a service a little while ago."

"I am very glad to see you," said Dick, "for I feel deeply indebted to—"

"Now, no more of that! I am indebted to you. Thanks for arresting my attention, or I should have dashed headlong into those fellows. You seem surprised to see me riding back, but I thought I would, if possible, embrace the opportunity of thanking you for the warning that you gave."

CHAPTER MXXXIX.

DICK TURPIN TAKES QUITE A FANCY TO CAPTAIN HAWK.

THERE was something verging very closely upon the ludicrous in the coolness and carelessness with which Captain Hawk pronounced these words.

The idea that a man, instead of getting as far away from his foes as he could, should actually turn round again and gallop back, with no other object than that which he had expressed, was certainly out of all character.

Dick Turpin thought so, and said:

"You are very welcome, and I am glad you got off so easily; still, I should scarcely have expected that you should take the trouble, and also run the risk of—"

"Galloping back again, I suppose you were going to say," interrupted the captain, with a merry laugh. "Bless you! I think nothing of it, for, thanks to Satan—"

"To Satan?" echoed Dick.

"Not his infernal majesty, by any means," answered the captain, "but to my horse here, whose equal never did and never can exist. He is matchless in every attribute that a horse should possess."

Dick gave a peculiar smile.

"You think so," he said.

"I am certain of it."

"Then I beg to differ."

"Differ?"

"Yes, and, without offence, I hope you will permit me to say that, while admitting yours is a noble creature, and one which you ought to prize as you do your own life, yet I have one in my possession that I cannot allow to be inferior to him in any respect whatever."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, somewhat stiffly. "You are welcome to your own opinion, but you must not expect me to subscribe to it."

"Just so, and allow me to make the same remark."

"Certainly. There is but one steed in the whole world to which I can believe my Satan to be inferior, and that steed I would give much to see. I have heard much of it by report, but I am not disposed to credit more than half of the wonderful stories that I hear. But even if I ever am so fortunate as to see it, I shall not be very ready to yield the palm."

"Indeed," said Dick, with the same peculiar smile upon his countenance—"and may I ask you what steed it is of which you have heard so much?"

"The one in the possession of Turpin, the highwayman, and I believe commonly known as Black Bess. But what are you laughing at?"

"Excuse me, at you."

"At me! What for?"

"Merely for thinking that your steed, however good his qualities may be, could for a moment compare with Black Bess."

"You don't think so?"

"I am certain."

"Well, as I told you, I would give much to see this wonderful mare, and scarcely any less to see her rider."

"Then," said Dick, quietly, "you can do so without further trouble."

The captain stared at him incredulously.

"You don't mean to say that—"

"Well, I do mean to say that this is Bonny Black Bess, and I am Dick Turpin, very much at your service, and very much obliged to you for your kind behaviour to my wife here."

"That your wife?"

"It is, I assure you."

The captain was so amazed that he could not utter another word.

He sat on his steed like a statue of astonishment.

"You seem incredulous!" said Dick, after a pause.

"No, surprised, that's all," cried Captain Hawk, with something like a return to his former gaiety of manner.

"Dick Turpin," he said, extending his hand, "I am heartily glad to see you! I have longed, wished to do so, and let me say if you want a friend that will stand to you back and edge, you have such a friend in me."

Dick cordially grasped the hand so warmly extended to him.

"Beyond being aware that you are called by the name of Captain Hawk, I know nothing of you. Still, be you whom you may, I rejoice to make your acquaintance, and accept your offer as freely as it is made."

"That's just it!" said the captain. "And if you don't mind listening I will give you a very brief account of myself. That formality may well be dispensed with in your case, as your reputation is by this time tolerably established."

Dick bowed.

"I should feel very much favoured," he said, "for I have some dim recollection of having heard of you."

"But there is no reason why you should be detained the while. If you have no objection I will ride for a little way by the side of you, and if we do not go very fast we shall be able to converse at our ease."

"Will it be taking you out of your way?"

"No, not at all. I am bound for nowhere to-night, so that it matters little which direction I take."

"In that case, then, I shall be glad to adopt the arrangement, for I have an appointment I do not wish to miss."

"Exactly *et*," said Captain Hawk, with a smile, and at the same time he turned his horse round and urged him gently forward.

This, however, was by no means so easy a matter as it might appear, for Satan was impatient at the least restraint.

As for Black Bess, so well did she understand her master's manner, and so thoroughly was she under subjection to him, that he had no difficulty in making her go at just what pace he desired.

"I daresay you wonder what brought the police officers to the ruins," the captain began, "but I am to blame for that; though as things have turned out all right, I hope you will forgive me."

"But I do not understand."

"I will soon explain myself, however. I daresay you have heard of the particulars of our meeting in the lane?"

"You mean between yourself Maud?"

"Yes, if that is her name. Well, after she had asked me which was the way to the ruined castle I began wondering whatever she could want there at such a lonely hour. The longer I thought the more did my wonderment increase, and at last I resolved to shake off the officers as well and as soon as I could, double upon my course, and make my way to the ruins myself, in order to find out if I could what she wanted there, and also, believe me, I was animated with the idea that I might be able, perchance, to be of some assistance to her."

"You are thoughtful," said Dick, "and I appreciate your intention just as I should if it had been carried into effect."

"Well, now, I should rather think you would have wished me a thousand miles away, for, but for my interference, you would not have been interrupted by the officers."

"It does not matter, as it has turned out."

"No. For my part, I am glad, since it has procured me what I have wished for for so long—an introduction to yourself. But, leaving that, let me tell you I rode rather carelessly into the ruins, and must have been seen doing so by the grabs, for they were upon me in a moment."

"I had wondered what brought them there," said Dick. "It was a mystery to me, quite; but now all is explained."

"Yes; and I hope to your satisfaction."

"Quite so. And yet was it merely upon the chance that you might meet with us and thank us for warning you that you ran the great risk of galloping back?"

"It was indeed."

"Then you are one of two things."

"May I ask which and what?"

"I cannot well answer the first part of your question, but what I was about to say was that you were either very brave or very reckless."

"Just whichever you like—perhaps a little of both," responded the captain, with a light laugh.

"It may be so; but still—"

"You would have hesitated, I suppose?"

"I should."

"Well, you see, I place so much confidence in Satan's powers. He has carried me out of so many scrapes that I begin to have absolute belief in his powers of speed."

"Mind you do not put trust in him once too often," said Dick, seriously. "It is a pity to try a horse too much."

"Does Satan look the worse?"

"No; he does not, I confess."

"But stay! I am running on in this fashion, and yet I have not told you who I am—or, rather, I have not made you acquainted with my profession. I daresay, however, you can guess it."

"A highwayman?"

"Well, yes, I suppose that is what people will call me, and yet when I think of— But no matter—no matter!"

Some reminiscence of somewhat a sad character evidently came over the captain's face at this moment, but

by an effort he banished it, and was again smiling and light-hearted as before.

"Perhaps," he said, "the time may come when we shall be better acquainted, and if so, I may relate to you something of my early life. You will find much that is strange in it."

"Very likely; and at the same time I may be able to convince you that your Satan is inferior to my own Black Bess. We will have a trial of speed some day—of course, now it is impossible, as she carries a double burden."

"Certainly!"

The captain seemed as though he was about to say farewell to Dick, and yet for some reason or other he appeared to shrink from doing so.

"I have a further favour to ask of you," he said, "though I fancy you will consider me too importunate."

"Not at all. Pray speak freely."

"Well, then, above all other things, I should desire to be made known to your comrades. I have heard so much of them by common rumour, that I am most impatient to do so."

"I see no reason why that request should not be granted," answered Dick, "for I am now within a very short distance of a place where we had agreed to meet, and where they are doubtless impatiently awaiting our arrival."

"I will take you at your word," said Captain Hawk, "for such a chance may not occur again."

"I intended you to take me at my word. Let us make better speed. We shall soon reach our destination."

This was quickly verified, for at that time Dick was not very far from the blighted tree.

Owing to the increase in the rate of speed, but few words were exchanged.

Captain Hawk was one of those individuals that few can help liking.

As for Dick Turpin, he took a strong fancy to him from the first, there was something in his manner so very jovial and free.

Tom Davis, however, did not look exactly pleased, and by his manner it would seem as though he was exceedingly desirous of saying a few words to Dick in private.

For this, however, there was of course no opportunity, so he fidgeted about very uneasily indeed.

Tom was by nature rather distrustful of new-comers, and he by no means shared in Dick's prepossession in favour of Captain Hawk.

Without knowing why, Tom felt dubious about him, and he felt positive Dick had been indiscreet to give so ready a compliance to his last-made request.

All Tom Davis could do was to keep a sharp look-out on all the movements of the captain, and as his action was limited to so little, he resolved to perform that little well.

The old tree was reached, however, without the occurrence of any incident whatever.

But Tom Davis was not inclined to abate any of his caution on that account.

No sooner had they all come to a halt, than Dick exclaimed:

"I scarcely expected to be first upon the ground. What can have detained the others so long, I wonder?"

The reader will remember that Tom King was the first to arrive at the place of rendezvous, but upon hearing the horseman approach, had carefully concealed himself.

The very moment, however, that the sound of Dick's well-known voice reached his ears he came forth.

"I am here," he said.

"And Cland and Jack?"

"I have seen nor heard nothing of them since we parted."

"Hush!" said Maud. "I hear some one now."

The sound of horses' hoofs could now be distinguished plainly.

"Here they are, I'll be bound!" cried Dick.

"It would be wisest to draw aside and make sure, would it not, captain?" said Tom Davis.

"Certainly it would."

Without the utterance of another syllable, this proposal was carried into execution.

They had barely time to take up their positions before the horsemen made their appearance.

They were recognised at a glance.

"Safe and sound?" asked Dick, riding forward.

"Wind and limb, captain," was the reply; "but we have met with no success, and so our only hope is that you have been more fortunate."

"I have. I have recovered Maud, who has sustained no serious injury. She has been aided and succoured by one I have great pleasure in making known to you. His name is, I believe, Captain Hawk."

"Quite at your service, gentlemen, and very happy indeed to make your acquaintance."

Tom King, as well as Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, were much taken by surprise.

It was one of the rarest things in the world for them to make a new friend.

The darkness that reigned about this place prevented them from seeing the captain very distinctly.

The latter, fancying he observed some reserve on their part, said:

"Do not distrust me. I shall always be glad to aid you in any way I am able; and what is more, you will be pleased to understand that I am of the same fraternity as yourselves."

The announcement was by no means expected, and the effect of it was to cause a greater appearance of friendliness on the part of the three highwaymen.

Captain Hawk, however, was gifted with a full share of penetration.

He could see very well that the friends had some topics they wished to discuss, and to which they did not exactly feel inclined to make him party.

"It will not be long, I trust, before we meet again, but for the present we must part, as I have made arrangements I do not wish to break. To make any fresh place of appointment with you would, I know full well, be useless; but I shall trust to chance to throw us together again ere long. Good-bye to all!"

He bowed as he spoke.

"Remember, you have to be convinced about your steed!" Dick said, as he was departing.

The captain waved his hand, but made no other reply.

The next moment he had vanished in the darkness.

"Captain," said Tom Davis, urgently, though he scarcely raised his voice above a whisper—"captain!"

"What is it?"

"Do you think we ought to have let him go like that?"

"Let him go! What do you mean?"

"Why, captain, I distrust him, and that's the truth! What guarantee have you that he will not go at once and betray us to the officers?"

"No guarantee, certainly; but still, I consider it most unlikely that he should do so."

"I am of another opinion, captain."

"But what grounds have you?"

Here Tom Davis became mute.

He could only admit that he had been swayed by prejudice.

"It cannot matter either," added Turpin. "We do not intend to remain in this place many moments."

"No, decidedly not," said Claude Duval, with a shudder; "and the question we have first to decide is where we shall next take up our quarters."

"And it is a question deserving of much consideration," said Dick. "I had fancied that there would be no difficulty about this, but now I am quite at a loss for the moment what to advise."

This remark elicited some questions from his comrades, and Dick at once stated his former intention of returning to the ruins, but how the officers had seen them there.

He also made them aware of the manner in which he had become acquainted with Captain Hawk.

"But for that unlucky incident," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you may depend that no better or safer place for us could have been found for the present, and if one only half as good is now proposed I shall think we are extremely fortunate."

"Then just listen to me for a few moments," said Tom King. "I have been here waiting for you for some time,

and have all the while occupied my mind by thinking upon this very subject."

"And you think you can get us out of our difficulty?" said Turpin.

"I think I can."

"Proceed, then; there is no time to lose."

"First of all," said Tom, "it will be necessary for me to give you a brief account of my doings since our parting; without this explanation you will not be able to comprehend what I have to propose."

"Go on, then, only be careful to put your narrative into as few words as you can."

"You may depend I shall do that. Listen!"

Amid a profound silence, then, Tom King proceeded to make his comrades acquainted with those facts which have been already detailed to the reader.

In the intense interest which this narrative awakened they became forgetful of everything else.

When Tom brought his adventures to a conclusion, all declared that nothing could surpass them.

"But now, Tom," said Dick, "what is it you have to propose? I confess I am no nearer to forming any conception of it than I was before."

"Is it so indeed?"

"It is."

"Then prepare yourselves for a startler, for what I have to say will, I feel pretty certain, take you completely by surprise."

CHAPTER MXI.

RELATES WHAT BEFELL DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES BENEATH THE ROOF OF THE JOLLY TAR INN.

THE strongest curiosity was evinced, but what words can express the astonishment of all when Tom King said, as coolly as though it was the simplest and most trifling matter in the world:

"I propose, then, comrades, that for the present we take up our quarters beneath the roof of the Jolly Tar Inn."

"Where?" cried Dick, in utter amazement.

"I told you to prepare for a startler."

"But you are not in earnest?"

"I assure you I was never more so in my life."

"Then you are mad."

"I think not, captain."

"But the thing is impossible."

"Not at all."

"How so?"

"Where is the difficulty?"

"Why, how shall you get rid of Knight and Cunningham?"

"Get rid of them?"

"Yes."

"Why they are got rid of already."

"By whom?"

"By me. Depend upon it, they were so horribly frightened that no earthly consideration would ever induce them to cross that threshold again."

"But, then, there are the others."

"What others?"

"The officers."

"I doubt there are any there now."

"Why not?"

"The inquest was to have been held as yesterday—for it is nearly morning now—and when this formality is over, the bodies would be removed, the inn shut up and doubtless left to itself."

"It is worth trying, I think," said Turpin, after several moments' deliberation, "though to me it still looks like running our heads into the lion's mouth. However, should the officers find we have had the audacity to do this, we shall never be able to astonish them again."

"No matter for that," urged Tom. "I still consider the scheme practicable in every way, and I do not believe that either of you could propose a place where we should be safer."

"Perhaps not," said Dick; "and if the officers have really left the premises for good, I quite agree with you; I would give much to be satisfied on that point."

"You must be content to run the risk of that."

"The advantage which weighs principally with me," said Turpin, "is that we are now so near the spot proposed for our abiding-place. It will be very soon quite daylight and we ought to be under cover by then."

To this all assented unanimously.

"What do you say, then, comrades," asked Dick, "are you willing to say it shall be so?"

"Nay, you are our captain, and with whatever decision you may come to we shall be content; we know you would intend it for the best."

"Yes, and for all that my judgment might lead you astray; I do not desire that you should look upon it as infallible—that would be undertaking too great a responsibility."

"Well, captain, we are willing if you are."

"Can you suggest any other place?"

"No—not any."

"Then in that case I consider we have no alternative left us."

"You have decided, then?"

"Yes, in this way: we will try the inn for a few hours, at all events, and then we can come to any decision afterwards we may think proper."

This was agreeable to everyone.

Tom was pleased to find his proposal assented to.

It was really wonderful to see how they became reconciled and accustomed to the idea which had so startled them at first.

Already they began to look at it quite as an ordinary proceeding, their only concern being whether the officers had really left the premises or not.

They went the right way to ascertain this, for, without any more discussion, they turned their horses' heads in the requisite direction.

The distance could not be considered otherwise than trifling.

A short space of time brought them in its vicinity, and then Tom recommended a halt.

His recommendation was unhesitatingly complied with.

"I have been thinking," he said, "that it would be much the best to reconnoitre before venturing to approach too near; so if you will remain where you are and take care of my horse, I will soon let you know the existence of the present state of affairs."

"But shall you go quite alone?"

"Yes, I think it will be best, and I flatter myself I can execute the task better than either of you, because of my familiarity with the premises."

"Yes, that is an advantage."

"I am off, then. Above all things do not move one step from this spot until my return."

While these few words were being exchanged, Tom King had slipped off his horse and given the reins to Claude Duval.

"Are your pistols ready for use?" asked the latter, as he received the charge.

"Yes."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Be off, then, and good luck to you!"

Tom knew the value of time, so he did not wait for any more to be said, but glided off into the semi-darkness at once.

His comrades were able to observe his progress for some time, but at last he disappeared.

Tom grew more and more cautious as he approached the building.

The silence which prevailed was in the highest degree assuring.

By slow degrees he made his way round to the front of the inn.

To his great joy, not a single gleam of light appeared.

"They have gone," he muttered to himself. "I was certain they would not stay after such a horrible adventure as that."

However, neither the silence nor the darkness could be taken as proof that the inn was empty.

The question was, how was this very important and necessary fact to be ascertained?

Tom was a very little while in hitting upon an expedient.

It was one, however, that involved some degree of risk of discovery.

Nevertheless, he determined to put it into practice.

It was to hurl a small stone through one of the windows, and with sufficient force to cause considerable noise.

A moment's search enabled Tom to find just the kind of missile which he required.

This was a smooth round pebble.

Aiming it at one of the upper windows, he threw it with the full strength of his arm.

The crashing of glass sounded with alarming distinctness in the profound silence which prevailed.

Tom crouched down and anxiously awaited the result.

One, two, three, four minutes passed.

At the expiration of that interval there was no more indication that there were any human being in the house than there was at first.

"I knew I was right!" Tom muttered. "Everything falls just as I expected."

However, to make doubly sure, Tom once again made a tour of the premises.

The result was the same.

He now considered he was warranted in returning to his companions.

He found them all waiting for him in great suspense.

They had heard the crash of glass even where they stood, and had indulged in many vague speculations as to the cause of it.

Tom King soon resolved them.

The intelligence was received by all with the greatest satisfaction, Maud, however, alone excepted.

The fact of no notice having been taken of the stone was looked upon as sufficient proof that the house was empty.

But although she had not ventured to make any observation whatever, Maud shrunk back, appalled and terrified at the idea of taking up a residence in a place which had witnessed the perpetration of so many awful crimes.

Of one thing she was certain.

By no possibility could she ever summon up her courage to remain alone in that dwelling.

But where Dick Tarpin was she felt herself tolerably safe, though now she trembled from head to foot.

She thought it rather strange that Dick did not observe this circumstance, but the fact was, the whole of his energies just then were centred upon the task they had before them.

The nearer Maud drew to the hateful place, however, the more did her alarm increase.

The next words spoken by Tom King, however, gave her a fleeting satisfaction.

"Stop," he said—"there is one thing we have omitted now."

"What is that?"

"How are we to dispose of our horses?"

"True," answered Dick. "I don't know how we came to forget that."

"Are there no stables at the back?" asked Claude.

"I think so; but would it be safe for us to put our cattle there?"

"As safe as anywhere else, I imagine."

The matter was, as usual, left for Dick's decision.

"We will go a little closer," he said, "and then we shall be able to judge better."

Again they advanced towards the ill-omened dwelling, dispelling Maud's hope that something had been thought of which would result in an alteration of their arrangements.

They were careful to approach the inn with all due caution.

The first glance showed them that the outbuildings were of a spacious description.

"No fear of not finding accommodation here," said Claude.

He was right, for stable room was to be had in plenty, and, what was more, our friends found, after a brief search, that the place was by no means ill supplied with provender.

In order to be prepared for any sudden surprise, none of the trappings were removed from the horses.

The girths were loosened and the bits removed, but the bridles were not taken off.

Having seen thoroughly well to the comfort of their steeds, the highwaymen proceeded to look after their own accommodation.



[TOM KING PREVENTS THE ENTRANCE OF THE OFFICERS.]

By common consent, Tom King was allowed to take precedence of the rest.

He led the way at once to the little window through which he had previously effected an entrance.

Maud now clung so closely to Dick that he could not help noticing her excessive agitation.

"What ails you?" he said, in a whisper. "What do you fear?"

"To enter that fearful place."

"It has no doubt terrible reminiscences for you, but let me implore you to shake off all these timid feelings—they are unworthy of you, quite."

"I cannot help it."

"But consider that I am with you, and while I am, ought you not to feel secure?"

"I ought, I confess, but yet——"

"Tut, tut! Banish these fears. You ought to consider the probabilities there are that this place will prove

for us a safe asylum, since it will doubtless be shunned by all other living creatures."

"And we are forced to take up our habitation where no other human beings would venture to come."

"What of that?"

"Think of the awful deeds committed."

"What if we do? We are not guilty of them, so why should we fear?"

"Yes, but think of the poor creatures——"

"Nay, you had better not think at all, unless you will think as I do."

"How is that?"

"Why, all these people who may have perished here could, when alive, have done me but little harm had they chosen to combine against me; and such being the case, how unreasonable it would be to dread them now they are dead and past all power of interference in human affairs!"

Dick's certainly was a bold manner of thinking, and as certainly was it full of sound philosophy.

What further might have been said just then upon this topic we know not, for it was just at this moment that Tom King reached the little window.

He found it in precisely the same condition as he had left it, and this he and all the rest looked upon as a most favourable omen.

Before entering, however, they listened at the open window for the space of several moments.

The same silence continued to reign.

Encouraged by this, Tom King made his way in.

Dick Turpin came next, and assisted Maud to follow.

The others quickly entered too, and then the window was closed.

The darkness was intense.

"I think we might venture to risk a light," said Dick.

"We shall never grope our way if we do not, I am thinking," said Claude, who at once busied himself in producing the necessary materials.

A small lantern was quickly lighted, which did not give a very brilliant illumination, but yet quite sufficient to enable them to find their way across the room, which, it will be remembered, was the kitchen of the inn.

On gaining the passage beyond, greater caution than ever was made use of, though it was almost beyond doubt that no officers were in the place, or they must have heard the noise made by the entrance of so many people.

At length the room was gained where Tom had had so narrow an escape of discovery.

Here all was dark and silent too.

"I think we may venture to make ourselves contented now," said Tom. "I told you I was convinced that nothing would induce the officers to remain."

"You were right," said Dick, as he pushed open the door and entered the apartment which had been made the head quarters of the officers.

There were plenty of evidences of their presence to be seen, and from various indications the highwaymen concluded that their foes could not have taken their departure very long before.

For instance, the wood-ashes on the hearth were by no means cold, and dim wreaths of tobacco smoke hung about here and there.

"I hope we shall be safe for an hour or two, at all events," said Dick.

"So do I," responded Tom. "Our first care ought to be to go thoroughly over the premises, and see that every door and window is secured; we should then have nothing to fear from being suddenly taken by surprise."

All saw in a moment the absolute necessity of the adoption of this course, so it was set about being carried out without any more discussion.

But Claude was especially careful to carry the lantern in such a manner as to preclude, as far as possible, the chance of any of its beams being seen by any chance passer-by outside.

They came first to the front door.

This was fastened, but only by means of the lock, the key of which was absent.

"They would be able to enter readily enough, would they not?" said Tom. "But this will rather interfere with their arrangements."

While he made the last remark he put up a heavy iron bar, and pushed two heavy bolts into their sockets.

"Yes," said Claude, "they cannot enter that way without making a little noise—that is certain."

"They are excellent bolts and bars," remarked Dick; "and so far as this means of entrance is concerned, I shall not feel in the least degree alarmed."

The remainder of the inn was then carefully gone over, and every available fastening was made use of.

When on the upper storey, the chamber of death was peeped into.

The result was that Tom's conjecture was proved to be quite correct.

The two dead bodies had been removed.

When this fact was made known to all the rest, a feeling of increased security took possession of their breasts.

So far as they could tell, there was nothing to induce the officers to make a return to the premises, unless they could suspect that our friends had taken up their

quarters there, and this suspicion it was almost impossible that they should entertain.

On the present occasion, then, Dick Turpin and his associates may very fairly be excused for giving themselves over to the belief that for a time they were perfectly secure.

After some little deliberation, it was determined that they would make the apartment which the officers had occupied their head quarters.

Their feeling of security, however, was not so great as to cause them to omit the precautions which they usually took.

It was unanimously agreed upon that one should keep good watch and ward while the others slept, with the express understanding that the alarm should be given in case of the occurrence of the slightest circumstance of an unusual nature.

If the reader will think over the events which we have recently related he will discover that our friends had but few opportunities of enjoying rest.

As they had all been very busily engaged, they were now consequently terribly fatigued, and the feeling grew upon them now that there was no immediate need for active exertion.

On this account it was determined that all discussion as to their future movement should be postponed for a few hours.

In the meantime, they would all do their best to recuperate their wasted energies by sleep.

Dick Turpin kept watch for the first hour, and then he was relieved by Tom King.

CHAPTER MXLI.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN HOLD A CONFERENCE AND ARRIVE AT SOME HIGHLY-IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS.

ALTERNATING in this manner, many hours were passed.

The place chose for keeping guard was the small attic at the top of the house, and this, with a little trouble, was made to answer the purpose required of it as well as though it had been especially constructed and designed to answer the end in view.

As it stood, this attic had but one window, and this was situated in the front of the inn.

But the roof of the attic was composed of nothing but thatch, and in the highest place was not much above six feet from the floor.

It came sloping down equally on both sides from a point in the centre.

What our friends did then was to remove just as much of the thatch as was necessary to make a hole large enough for them to look through.

This was done on both sides, and opposite to the window as well.

The consequence of this arrangement was that, provided a good look-out was continually kept, it was not possible for anyone to approach unseen.

Here then, turn by turn, the highwaymen and Tom Davis kept watch.

A large expanse of country was presented to their view.

Night approached, however, without anything having been seen to give rise to the least alarm.

When darkness fairly closed in, of course this look-out from above became impossible.

All assembled, therefore, in the room below, which they had made as comfortable as the means at their disposal would admit of.

Without exception, everyone was in excellent spirits, for they, reasonably enough, looked upon their freedom from molestation so far as an earnest that they would continue to remain so.

The rest which they all enjoyed enabled them to think clearly upon the different matters about to be discussed, and assist them in coming to satisfactory conclusions.

All noticed what a look of intense expectation the countenance of Tom Davis wore.

They were not ignorant of the cause.

As for Davis himself, however, he did not give utterance to a word, but merely looked on anxiously.

"It seems to me," exclaimed Dick, after some preliminary but not very important observations had been exchanged—"It seems to me that the first thing to be considered is as regards our sojourn in this place."

In what way, captain?" asked Tom King.

"Why, I want to know whether you are all inclined and determined to remain here so long as the officers will allow us to do so?"

"Decidedly," replied a chorus of voices, in which, however, Maud's was not heard.

"That being resolved upon," continued Dick, "the next thing is with regard to Tom Davis's wife and Ellen. I need not say anything to remind you that we had resolved to allow them both to undergo their term of imprisonment. Not only were we at that time unable to offer them any assistance, but it was thought best that, as the term was so short, it had better be passed, and then they would be free from the officers so far as that offence was concerned."

"Exactly," said Claude Duval, "and if I am not greatly out of my reckoning, the time has nearly expired."

"It has, Davis, has it not?" asked Turpin.

"Three more days, captain," was the murmured reply.

"Then it is time we came to a decision. For my part, I have been considering the subject carefully, and the result is that several things have presented themselves to me of which I had not previously taken any account."

An immediate desire was expressed for an explanation.

"These things are of more moment to us than you may perhaps imagine. But to commence: in the first place, of course, at the appointed time they will both be set at liberty."

"Just so."

"Well, it will then be necessary that they should join us. But how is this to be done?"

"We might contrive to let them know," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, so we might," assented Dick, "it is not there that I see any particular difficulty."

"Where then?"

"Why, you must bear in mind how anxious the officers are to capture us."

"Don't be afraid we shall forget it, captain."

Dick laughed as he added:

"And do not forget that Tom Davis has been extracted from their clutches. This, however, is the point I wish to arrive at: the officers will know very well at what time Ellen and Mrs. Davis will be set at liberty, and you may depend that they will take all the advantage they can of the circumstance."

"But in what way, captain?"

"Why, they will think, of course, that the first thing the released persons will set about doing will be to regain their friends. Now do you understand me?"

"I think so," answered Tom King. "But go on—let us have it clearly understood."

"It is important enough."

"Clearly so."

"Well, then, the officers, depend upon it—or if not them, some of their agents—will be on the watch outside the prison, and as soon as Ellen and Mrs. Davis come forth they will fix their eyes upon them, and keep the closest watch upon every movement they may make."

Tom Davis covered his face with his hands, so that the expression of it might not be observed during the further progress of this, to him, important discussion.

"Depend upon it," said Claude Duval, "that is what they will do; but till it was mentioned, I never once thought of such a thing."

"It is well," said Dick, "that it has been thought of is time."

"Yes, thanks to you, captain."

Turpin passed over this compliment without remark, and went on to say:

"What we have now to consider is, how we can continue to prevent the officers from carrying out this plan. Rely upon it, they will try hard to get upon our track by this means; and if they do they will take care to be in such force as to make resistance difficult."

This prospect alarmed Maud greatly, and she crept more closely to Turpin's side, as she always did upon the approach of danger.

"Captain," said Tom Davis, "I can see very plainly how dangerous this will be to you, and therefore you must leave us to shift for ourselves; I will not consent

that you should all be drawn into so much extra peril—it is not right, and it shall not be!"

"Tom Davis!"

"Yes, captain."

"If you make another such a speech as that you shall be turned out of the room and not be allowed either to listen or to take part in the discussion."

"But—"

"Not another word. You must leave us to be the judges of what we think best and expedient, and what we intend to do."

"Certainly," cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Do you think we are going to make you such a return as that for all that you have done for us in time past?"

"But you have required that obligation times and times over," said Tom Davis, still with his face hidden, and speaking in a broken, husky voice.

"Nothing of the kind. But it is like you to forget all about the past. Let there be no more of this, for the way out of the difficulty I have laid before you is not so very perilous after all."

"Indeed, captain!" ejaculated the poor fellow, looking up with brightening eyes. "You must know this is the longest separation there has ever been between my wife and myself and Ellen. We have known good and evil fortune, but we have always been together. And as for Neli—bless her!—I love her as though she was my own child. It drives me mad when I think what I have brought her to."

"Rather remember what you saved her from; but that is like you again—never to remember the benefits you confer."

"But what was the way out of the difficulty that you spoke of?" interrupted Tom King, who spoke with considerable impatience.

"You shall hear."

"Go on then—we are listening."

"In the first place we must communicate with old Matthew."

"That sounds like getting into one difficulty to get out of another."

"It may be so; but listen."

"We will."

"I say we must communicate with old Matthew—and the sooner the better. This is in order that he may see Mrs. Davis and Ellen—if possible before their liberation—and make them acquainted with the nature of our plans."

"Just so. But—"

"Wait a moment, and you shall hear. What I suggest in order to baffle the officers is, that they shall both take up their quarters at some decent lodging in or near London—"

"London!" ejaculated all, in tones of surprise.

"Yes, and there they are to remain, say, for about a fortnight—or longer, if necessary. By the end of that time the ardour of the officers in watching them will have abated; then they must embrace an opportunity to slip off unperceived and make their way to us."

"But where will that be?"

"That we must determine."

"And it will be no easy matter, I fancy," said Claude Duval.

"So do I," responded Sixteen-String Jack. "I should like to know very much where we shall be to-morrow, let alone a fortnight hence."

"You seem amused," said Dick, with a smile; "but let me assure you that I can see my way quite clearly."

"You can?"

"Certainly."

"Then where shall we be?"

"Without directly answering that question, I think I can satisfy you. Suppose we fix upon a certain future time—say three weeks or a month hence—on one particular day, and at a certain hour we can arrange to be at a specified place—that is, if we are alive and it lies in the power of human beings."

"I begin to understand," said Tom King. "You would appoint a place and arrange for us all to meet there?"

"Certainly; and I cannot see any remarkable obstacle."

"Where shall we say?"

"Can you name a place?"

"I could, certainly; but before doing so, would it not be better to talk over our own proceedings in the meantime?"

"It would. That is well thought of."

"You have thought of this as well, captain?"

"I confess I have."

"Then let us hear all you have to say."

"I propose, then, that between now and the time of meeting we all occupy ourselves to the best of our ability, so as to get together a good round sum."

"For what purpose?"

"In order to place in the hands of Tom Davis for him to use as he may think fit, which will, I hope, in some measure recompense him for his losses."

"Now, captain, none of that."

"Tom Davis!"

"Yes, captain."

"Be good enough to understand that the only terms upon which you may be allowed to listen to our conference are, that you preserve a profound silence."

"But, cap—"

"If you interrupt again, out you go, and you hear no more."

After this, Tom Davis was obliged to be quiet, though he was burning to give utterance to his expostulations.

"Very good," said Tom King, approvingly. "I for one will do my best to make the sum as round as possible."

"So will we," cried Claude and Jack. "We will show him what we think about him."

"As to the manner in which this money is to be employed, I have my own ideas, and if you, my comrades, think them good, they will be carried out, I hope."

"Cap—!" began Tom Davis.

"Silence, will you!"

Thus admonished, the highwayman's faithful ally held his tongue.

"My proposition is, that as soon as we place the money in his hands he shall, with all speed possible, make his way out of England. The amount, I hope, will be such as will enable him to live out a long life in comfort in some other clime."

This proposal was received with universal acclamation.

"Captain," broke in Tom Davis, the tears rolling down his cheeks, "I shall never be able to utter my thanks; and rest assured I shall never be able to forget this generous mark of your favour."

"So far, then," Dick went on, "we may say all is settled, and all that there is for our consideration is one or two minor points."

"But yet unfortunate ones."

"Yes, decidedly. In the first place, as to the rendezvous."

"It ought surely to be near to the sea-side."

"Yes, bearing in mind the end we have in view, it ought."

"And as solitary and retired as possible."

"It cannot be too much so."

"Then where is that place to be found?"

"Can you tell?"

"Not straight off at once. Can you?"

"I have had a place in my mind, but perhaps some better one may be suggested."

"Nay, let us hear it."

"I would rather not at present."

"Yes—yes—"

"Well, then, since you will have it—Stonehenge."

"Stonehenge?" all repeated.

"Yes; you know it, do you not?"

"We have heard of it."

"That, then, is all that I can say."

"But what made you fix upon that place?"

"I have always been led to believe that it is far away from every human habitation, and that no one is seen there except some occasional wanderer brought thither by curiosity. Not only that, however, it is a place that can so easily be found, and the way to which may be asked without the creation of much suspicion."

"You must have considered this subject well, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Do you think so?"

"I do, or else you could not possibly have been so well prepared at all points as you are. You have actually left us nothing to do but to give our consent to whatever you have advanced."

"But I did not intend such to be the case. I wanted to hear your opinions."

"But we could think of nothing so good as that: which you appeared to propose offhand."

"Well—well. If you are satisfied, that is all."

"We are perfectly. There is only one thing, though."

"What is that?"

"We have not come to a conclusion about the communication with old Matthew."

"No, true."

There was a peculiar smile upon Dick Turpin's lips, and a peculiar intonation of his voice as he thus spoke, which made Maud creep closer still to him.

"Let us decide it, then."

"With all my heart; and as you all say you have done nothing hitherto but give consent, let me now hear one of your proposals."

There was immediately such a sudden inclination for all to speak, that nothing save a confused Babel of sounds arose.

"One at a time," said Dick—"one at a time!"

"Will you hear me first, captain?" cried Tom King.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I will resolve the difficulty in a moment; I will just ride over to old Matthew to-morrow night and put matters square."

The cool manner in which Tom spoke forced every one to smile.

"It is too much risk," interposed Tom Davis, but he was silenced and cautioned before he could say any more.

"You have soon settled it, Tom," said Dick, "and in the same manner as myself, but with this difference, that—"

"You intended to go yourself, I suppose you would say?"

"Just so."

"No, no," cried Maud, clinging tightly to him, "for my sake let me implore you to abandon this idea! Banish it at once! I could not survive the time that would elapse during which you would be absent!"

"Come, Maud—Maud!"

"It is in vain to appeal to me! It is not often that I ask you a favour; do not let me this time beg in vain!"

"But you must consider—"

Maud shuddered, and then burst into tears.

Against this last Dick was not proof for a single moment.

He could bear all things but Maud's tears, and they conquered him at once.

The sight of her distress was more than he could bear.

"Dry your eyes," he said. "Do not weep. Your request is granted."

"And you really will not go?"

"I will not, since such is your wish."

The smile that overspread Maud's countenance at this moment was sufficient recompense to Dick for anything, though for all that he felt that it would have afforded him no ordinary satisfaction could he but once more have grasped old Matthew's hand and gazed upon his jovial face.

CHAPTER MXLII.

TOM KING IS RECOGNISED ON REACHING LONDON.

"Is it determined, then," asked Tom King, briskly "that I shall go?"

"Well, you spoke first."

"I did."

"But what say Claude and Jack?"

"Well," responded the pair alluded to, "we will resign our claims in favour of him. It would be too bad to disappoint him—he seems quite to have set his heart upon it."

"I have," said Tom—"you are perfectly right there."

"When would you start?"

"I am ready now."

"I think the enterprise had better be postponed until to-morrow night," said Dick. "If you were to start now, you would have scarcely time to get there before daybreak."

"You are right; and not only that—some cunning scheme must be devised, for I daresay the officers keep as sharp a look-out as ever upon Old Matthew's premises."

"You may depend they do."

"I have no wish to run any extra risk of capture if I can help it."

"Of course not."

"And now I shall have good time to think."

"And your horse to rest."

"Just so."

This concluded the settlement of every arrangement.

The rest of the night was passed in conversation, which, though interesting enough to those who took part in it, is scarcely worth reproducing to the reader.

No disturbance whatever took place, and Tom King was over and over again congratulated upon his wisdom in choosing out such a place of refuge.

There was indeed little fear that the officers would visit it again, and then it was still more improbable that any persons would come forward who were desirous of occupying a place with so evil a name.

The hours of the following day lagged by somewhat tediously.

All were anxious for night to come.

Maud, however, was filled with a strange dread.

She was afraid that when the hour arrived for Tom King to set forth, Dick would want to set out upon an adventure too.

How far she was correct in her surmise will shortly be seen.

Long before the approach of twilight, Tom King had completed every preparation he had resolved to make.

It is not necessary here to state just what precise steps he had determined to take, because we shall follow him, and then his actions will speak for themselves.

Moreover, it was a case in which it was not possible to arrange much beforehand, as the least chance circumstance might have the effect of altering everything.

Of one thing there could be no doubt.

Despite the cool, offhand manner in which he treated the enterprise, it was one of very great risk and danger.

So soon as ever the obscurity of twilight had deepened sufficiently to make it prudent for him to begin his journey, he led his horse out of the stable and mounted him.

His companions watched him until the trees hid him from their view.

"Now, captain," said Claude, "have you any arrangements for us to-night?"

"None that I know of."

"In that case, then," continued Sixteen-String Jack, "we had made up our minds for an adventure or two together."

"Of course tending to the end we have in view."

"Yes, certainly. None so profitless and unsatisfactory to others as Claude's adventure with the ladies."

Dick laughed, for he had been much amused when the incident was related to him.

"If so," he replied, "Tom Davis will come but poorly off."

Claude and Jack were quite ready for the road, with the exception of mounting their steeds, so that before many seconds had elapsed they had taken their departure.

"And now, Maud," said Dick, "do not seek to dissuade me from what I purpose, and then you will be spared the mortification of finding your appeal disregarded."

"No, no, Dick!" she cried, imploringly. "You—you must not go!"

"I cannot stay here; and bear in mind, I do not ask you to remain alone—Tom Davis will be with you, so that I shall be under no apprehensions whatever as regards your safety, because I know how well qualified he is to keep guard over you, and because I know he would lay down his life in your defence."

"Yes, captain," said Tom Davis—"you are no more than right there."

"Still—still, you must not go!" sobbed Maud. "The bare thought of having to remain in that dreadful place without you almost kills me!"

"Maud, I have spoken," said Dick, endeavouring to display an amount of firmness and resolution he was far from feeling.

"And I have spoken too. If my entreaties are of no avail, I will cling to you thus, and nothing but actual violence shall cause me to release you!"

"And that you know I shall not offer."

"I hope not, and so abandon this project at once—or if you must go, take me with you."

"Take you with me?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Do you know the nature of the enterprise?"

"That signifies not, so long as I am with you."

"But in the moment of danger what could I do if I had you? The consciousness of your presence would paralyse my arm."

"Then why has it not done so on many an occasion when you have freed me from great peril? Dick—Dick, that is nothing but a pretext—an excuse!"

"Nay—nay."

"It is so. It is the inclination that is wanting; and when that is the case it is the easiest thing in the world to frame excuses."

"Maud, I—"

"You no longer wish me to be with you—that is it! But go—go!—you are welcome now. I have tested you, and am satisfied."

But Maud's satisfaction was of a very singular character indeed, for she immediately turned round and wept bitterly.

Dick displayed a momentary hesitation.

Then coming suddenly to a decision, he said:

"Come, Maud, for once you shall have your way. I could not pass the night in inaction beneath that roof, so I will take you with me; but you must promise to obey all the instructions I shall give you that shall tend to a preservation of your safety."

"Yes, yes—I promise all gladly—I will promise anything!" exclaimed Maud, for, to tell the truth, she was delighted at the prospect of quitting the inn during the long, silent hours of the night.

It was then agreed that the place was to be given into the charge of Tom Davis, upon whose horse Maud was to ride.

A few moments enabled them to get in readiness to set forth.

"It is a long time since we had an adventure together, Bess," said Dick, as he sprang on to the back of his bonny mare; "but I hope fortune will favour us this time."

Maud was in the best possible spirits; and as the horse upon which she sat was a very good one, she was able to keep pace well with Black Bess.

Her breath came and went quickly, and her cheeks were vivid red, for she could not control the agitation and excitement which the prospect of a night of adventure occasioned.

We shall leave them together setting out from the inn, however, as we shall also leave Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

We feel that Tom King has the first and strongest claim upon our attention.

For this reason we shall follow closely in his footsteps, and it will be found that his adventures on this occasion were truly of unparalleled description.

Our old friend, then, rode on for some distance in deep thought.

He knew very well that this part of the country was of a very lonely character, and that his chances were quite against his meeting with anybody.

Swayed by this conviction, he did not look about him with that keenness and closeness which he usually made use of.

The only disguise he had was in the shape of a voluminous riding cloak, in which, when on foot, he could, if he chose, envelop his whole form.

This seemed rather inefficient, considering the nature of the place in which he proposed to venture.

"I must ride fast," muttered Tom, "to get all done in time, and therefore, no matter how tempting an adventure may present itself, I must pass it by, or else relinquish what I have in hand, and that can never be."

Tom increased the speed of his horse as he spoke.

It so happened on this occasion that he was not subjected to any temptation; and this will appear the less surprising when the reader is informed that, in accordance with his usual custom, Tom altogether forsook the high-road and lanes, bending his way in as straight a line as possible across the open country.

By adopting this means he reached the environs of London in a much shorter time than he would have done otherwise.

"I will put a bold face upon it," was Tom's thought as he rode into the metropolis. "It is more likely to command success than any elaborate scheme. At any rate, I will make the trial to-night of how much can be accomplished by the sheer force of impudence alone."

It was scarcely likely, however, that Tom would be insane enough to think of riding up to old Matthew's door, and yet he held on his course as though such was his intention.

On nearing Covent Garden—then strikingly a different place to what it is at present—he came to a halt.

So far had he proceeded, to all appearances, in perfect safety.

The hour would not now be considered at all a idle one, and yet Tom had found but few people abroad.

But in those days, when the only illumination the streets boasted of only served to render darkness visible—necessitating late travellers to engage the services of a link-boy, who would run before them with a lighted torch—few people ventured out after dark, unless upon some particular occasion.

Tom King drew rein close to the entrance of a dark and gloomy archway.

At first he did not alight, but, shrouded by the darkness, sat in the saddle, straining his eyes and endeavouring to make out whether the coast was clear.

"Hullo, my noble captain!" said a voice. "Air you a looking for some oove for to mind yer horse, because if so, d'ye see, I see here."

Tom King was not able at first to make out from whence the voice proceeded.

Upon looking down more closely, however, and having also the sound to guide him, he caught sight of an attenuated form, clad in tattered clothes, which was holding the stirrup, in order to assist him to alight.

The face turned up to the highwayman's gaze was pinched and thin with hunger, the cheeks white and sunken, and the eyes large, staring, and preternaturally white.

"Can I trust you to take care of him?" asked Tom King, endeavouring while he spoke to obtain a better view of the hunger-starved face.

"Rather," was the reply. "You don't come here very often, or you'd a knowed me. I see always here."

"Well," said Tom, slipping quickly from the saddle. "I'll put faith in you. I am not going far, and do not expect to be detained many minutes."

"I'll take care of him, captain, no matter how long you may be."

"Above everything," said Tom, "don't stir from this place. Whatever the time may be when I return, let me find you in this exact spot, because I shall be in a hurry."

"All right—you can depend upon me."

"Take that, then, as an earnest of what I shall give you."

Tom slipped a shilling into the boy's hand.

"Oh, my eye!" he exclaimed; then, as if suddenly smitten with a doubt as to the genuineness of the coin, he slipped it between his teeth and endeavoured to bend it.

"It's good," he said, in a satisfied voice, and immediately thereafter the shilling disappeared.

"You will be sure to comply with my instructions?"

"Certain."

"That's enough. I shall not be more than half an hour at the—"

At this instant there was the sound of footsteps, and the flashing of a light.

"Hullo, there!" said a gruff voice. "What are you about there? Is it murder, or treason, or what?"

"Or what," answered the boy. "Don't make a fool of yourself, Moses. Don't you see it's me? It's all right."

Tom, turning round, saw that this new-comer was clad in the garb of a watchman.

He was closely muffled up in order to protect himself from the cold, and in one hand he carried a lantern, and in the other a stout cudgel.

Tom was annoyed at the light being brought, but dared not show his annoyance.

He kept himself closely shrouded in his cloak, however; and as if to prevent it from being blown off by the wind, drew his hat down further over his face.

"Take this, my friend," said Tom, giving the watchman

a shilling, "and buy something to keep the cold out; and at the same time, if you would have an eye on my mare here I would be obliged to you."

"Your honour's honour is a perfect gentleman. Good luck go with you for the rest of your days!"

Tom merely waved his hand.

Then hurried off.

All things considered, he believed he had managed matters so far with a tolerable amount of success.

A very few minutes, he knew, would enable him to walk as far as old Matthew's, and he determined not to stay here any longer than was just necessary to enable him to communicate Dick's wishes.

Had he lingered a little while, however, or could he have heard what took place immediately after his departure, his satisfaction would have suffered a considerable abatement.

The boy, with his dark, gleaming eyes, watched Tom for some distance.

Then turning round, he placed his hand to his mouth and said, in a hoarse voice, which scarcely rose above a whisper:

"Moses—Moses!"

The watchman, with a laudable desire to act upon the good advice given him by Tom, was already on the way to a house where he knew he could obtain a cordial that would comfort him greatly.

Upon hearing his name pronounced, however, he looked back.

"Well, young villain!" he ejaculated. "What now?"

"Here—here!"

"What do you want?"

"Come here, and I'll tell you."

"Don't you wish you may get it! I'm off."

"But, Moses—Moses!"

"Oh, bother!"

"Come here."

"I shan't!"

"Who stole the church can—"

The watchman uttered a howl which drowned the concluding syllables of the word which the boy had begun to utter.

At the same time Moses turned round and rushed towards the boy, brandishing his cudgel in a manner well calculated to inspire fear.

The boy dodged behind the horse with the agility of a monkey.

"You young demon!" snarled the watchman—"I'll be the death of you, I will! I'll beat your bones to batter! Take that!"

He aimed a desperate blow with his heavy cudgel as he spoke, but it was easily avoided.

"Don't be a fool, Moses!" said the boy. "I've got something more important to tell you than ever you heard in your life. What do you think of that, now?"

"Bah!"

"It's true!"

"What did you mean by yelling out like that?"

"Because I wanted you to turn back."

"Yes, curse you!"

"And I knew well enough that would make you. But listen, Moses—there's no joking about the matter, none at all—not a little bit, I assure you."

"Come, then, be quick—tell me now at once; and if ever you allude again—"

"Oh, never mind that!"

"I say if I ever hear you allude again—"

"To your stealing the church can—"

"I'll be the death of you, I will, and I'll sell your body to the doctors. What do you think of that?"

"Why, I think you are a fool for not listening to what I have to say."

"Speak quick, then!"

"I will. I should have told you before this, only you would not listen."

There was something in the tones of the boy's voice, and something in the manner in which he bent forward, his breast panting fearfully, that made the obtuse-percepted watchman conscious that the disclosure about to be made was of no ordinary or slight importance.

"Speak," he said—"speak—I am listening!"

"Then you saw that swell cove that was with me?"

"The one belonging to this horse?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"No—never saw him before."

"Ah!"

"Do you?"

"What?"

"Know him?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

The boy bent closer still to the old watchman.

He caught hold of the collar of his white dress coat, and pulled him down by it until his lips were close to his ear.

Then he whispered something.

The watchman gave a great start.

"That Tom King the highwayman?" he ejaculated.

"Hold your row, you fool!" growled the boy, savagely.

"Do you want all Covent Garden to hear you?"

"But it ain't true."

"I tell you it is!"

"Are you certain?"

"As certain as I am this is a horse."

"How came you to know him?"

"I've seen him afore. I thought I knew him afore you came up, but when the light of your lantern fell on his face I was quite certain—I would swear to his identity out of ten thousand."

"Then we will call the police and follow him. No, stop—I'll spring my rattle. That's the ticket!"

With more agility than he had displayed for many a day, the watchman dropped his cudgel and drew his ponderous rattle from his belt.

But the boy, with a cry of suppressed anger, snatched it from his hand and threw it with all his might down the gateway.

"You infernal old fool!" he exclaimed, almost choked with passion. "You idiot! Do you know what you are after?"

"Yes—do you?"

The watchman quickly repossessed himself of his cudgel, and aimed another blow at his companion with it.

But, as before, it was evaded.

"Moses, if you don't listen quietly," he said, "and do what I tell you, I'll peach about the——"

"Go on. I'm quiet."

"Well, then, now pay attention, and I will let you know how to go to work to get the most of the reward."

"That's it—that's it."

"Then, if you had gone on we should have had none."

"What must I do, then?"

"Why, he's got so far off by this time that you could not overtake him now, but you might make him aware that we know who he is, and then what should we have for our pains?"

"His horse."

"True; we should have that in any case; but I want something more."

"The reward?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"But why don't you tell me what to do at once?"

"There is no violent hurry, and I want a little time to reflect. Ah! I have it."

"Where?"

"Here, in my brain box. He will be sure to come back for his horse, won't he, because he will think all is right?"

"Yes, I should say he is sure to come back."

"Well, then, you must go over to the station in Bow Street—Or, stop a moment. You mind the horse."

"I shan't!"

"Then I peach!"

"Come on!"

The watchman took hold of the rein of Tom's horse, though somewhat reluctantly.

The boy was evidently in possession of a secret that gave him the mastery whenever he threatened to divulge it.

"Now don't you stir, Moses," he said. "If you do, you know the result. I have threatened you many a time, but that would be the last. Mind you are here when I come back."

"Never fear me."

"That's enough; I am off."

"Where to?"

"Why, to Bow Street, to be sure."

"What to do?"

"Fetch some police officers. But don't be alarmed, I shan't tell them anything about you unless you force me to do so by neglecting my injunctions."

With these words upon his lips, this singular being turned round and bounded off into the darkness.

The watchman felt far from comfortable, and more than once he was tempted to let go the horse and be off, leaving his companion to finish the adventure how he liked.

But the dread of his wrath prevailed, and perhaps, too the prospect of a share in the reward offered for the apprehension of the highwayman had some weight with him.

The boy was only absent a few minutes.

Each second, however, seemed to the watchman almost an hour in duration, so great was the excitement of mind under which he laboured.

At length, to his mingled satisfaction and alarm, he heard the sounds of many footsteps.

The next moment the well-known voice of the boy reached his ears.

"This is the place," he heard him say, "and here is his horse just as I told you. Do you believe me now?"

The six officers who accompanied the boy seemed incredulous.

Some questioned the watchman.

Some particularly examined the horse.

The result of this was, that after a brief conversation they came unanimously to the conclusion that fortune had at length placed the highwayman in their hands.

"Now," said the boy, with that sharpness which seemed natural to him—"now that you are perfectly satisfied that all is right, just let us frame a bargain."

"A bargain?" repeated one of the officers.

"Yes, a bargain," mimicked the boy, though he spoke with great resolution. "I know you all of old, and don't intend to be fobbed off as you have many I have heard of."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, and in fact too. You needn't sneer!"

"What terms do you propose?"

"Why, there are eight of us altogether, and the reward must be equally divided."

"Oh, must it?"

"It must."

"But suppose we don't agree?"

"Then you don't take your prisoner!"

"You can't prevent it."

"Can't I?"

"No."

"Well, you'll see! If I have any bother with you I shall just shout out to him when I see him coming, and make him aware of his danger, and I should not care what you did with me afterwards!"

"Well, my lad, you seem quite a sharp chap—certainly a credit to your mother, I should say."

"Never mind that. Do you consent—yes or no?"

"Why, yes, of course. We never thought of anything else, only you would put yourself out about nothing."

"Never mind, I am determined to have my equal share of the reward; and if you attempt to do me out of it you will suffer for it; and you can ask Moses here whether I shall not be as good as my word."

"He's a little demon," said Moses, though in an admiring way rather than otherwise.

"Well," said the officer who had all along spoken, and who happened to be a newly-made sergeant, and consequently very proud of his new dignity, "as we have settled all that, let us hear what comes next?"

"Why," said the boy, "you must all hide yourselves carefully in that gateway, taking the utmost care to keep out of sight. It's a cute fellow you have to do with, bear in mind—one that can smell danger a long way off, as they say a rook can smell powder."

"We could have told you that, sharpshins."

"Then let me advise you to hide at once, and say no more, for I expect him to come every moment, and the sound of voices would put him on the alert at once."

The officers were much annoyed at the commanding tone of this boy, and if they could possibly have acted in opposition to his injunctions they would have done so.

But they were quick-witted enough to see that what he

proposed was the best course of action that could be pursued.

Without exchanging any more remarks, then, they took up their positions in the gateway as directed.

This was so large and so profoundly dark, that they experienced no difficulty whatever in concealing themselves effectually.

The whole of the party was in high spirits.

The police officers saw the immense advantage they possessed.

The highwayman would be sure to return to his horse, and then, if they kept still, how could he suspect anything of their presence?

Then, if they waited until he was in the act of mounting, how easy it would be for them to spring forth and overpower him?

There was little fear, either, that he would escape from them after capture as he had escaped from others.

They were within almost a stone's throw of Bow Street police station, so that they could deposit him there in the space of a few moments.

So far as the officers themselves were concerned, it was impossible that things could wear a more encouraging aspect.

There was not one of them who did not look upon the affair as completely settled.

The boy was so excited that he could scarcely breathe.

He endeavoured to reckon up what would be his exact share of the reward, but this arithmetical feat was far beyond his capacity in his present perturbation of spirits.

Truly now was the peril that threatened our old friend great indeed.

Of all this he was as profoundly ignorant as it was possible for a human being to be of anything.

The street, too, had a deceitful air of calmness and repose about it.

A chance passer-by would never for a moment suspect that half a dozen well-armed, determined men were hiding in the gateway.

Time passed on.

Not more than an hour certainly; but this space of time seems of endless duration to those who are each moment in the expectation of the occurrence of some particular event.

The officers began to grow uneasy.

The boy, too, began to lose some of that confidence which he had hitherto felt.

Could it be possible that by some means or other—means both mysterious and incomprehensible—Tom King had become acquainted with this design upon his life and liberty?

The thought was a maddening one.

But the time had not yet arrived for despair.

Upon a reconsideration of the whole matter, the boy could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was possible for Tom King to suspect anything.

While in the gateway, the officers had held a long, whispered conversation with Moses, the watchman.

He assured them positively that the boy spoke the truth, for, not altogether unreasonably, the officers had their doubts.

These, however, were completely dispelled after the watchman had answered their interrogations respecting the outward appearance of the traveller.

These answers made them certain that it could be no other than Tom King.

It was scarcely credible that the same description could apply so closely to another person.

More time passed.

All were too anxious for the result now to utter a single word.

The silence became irksome.

The boy strained his hearing to the utmost.

At length he caught the sound of a rapid footstep.

"Hush—hush!" he said, in a whisper, to the officers behind him. "Be in readiness to act, but do not be too precipitate, and so lose him. Not one word! He is coming now! Can you hear him? Hark—hark!—he is coming!"

CHAPTER MXLIII.

TOM KING FALLS BLINDLY AND HELPLESSLY INTO THE SNARE SO CUNNINGLY LAID FOR HIM.

WHETHER or not it was really Tom King who was approaching the spot where the officers were so cleverly concealed we must now proceed to ascertain.

In order to do this, we must follow in our old friend's footsteps.

Having left his horse in the joint care of the boy and the watchman, in the manner we have described, Tom felt tolerably satisfied so far as that point was concerned.

It is not surprising that it should be banished almost entirely from his thoughts before he had well quitted the precincts of Covent Garden when we bear in mind what other weighty matters were pressing on his mind, all of which required particular consideration.

He glanced about him keenly as he drew nearer to the place of his destination, for it was here that he looked for and expected danger.

But on this particular night an unusual quiet reigned in the streets—a quiet which, had Tom been fancifully disposed, he might have looked upon as of ill omen.

Strangely enough, however, he never felt more at ease or more confident of his own powers.

There was no inner intangible sense to warn him that he was in so great peril.

Drury Lane looked strangely dark and drear.

Tom made his way into it by means of a court leading out of Brydges Street, and which brought him out almost directly opposite the White Horse Inn.

Under the concealing shadow of the entrance to this court, Tom paused a second to reconnoitre.

He could see no one about.

He could not even detect the sound of a distant footstep.

As usual, a light was shining forth from the ground-floor windows of the inn, and where he stood he could hear the sound of noisy, boisterous merriment.

Now was the opportunity.

It might be that such a one would never occur again.

Tom thought so, and darted across the street like a quickly-fitting shadow.

He drew a long breath upon finding himself fairly over the threshold.

Without hesitating an instant, he pushed open that inner half-glass door which in the course of this history we have so frequently had occasion to make mention of.

The bar window was now before him.

He reached it in half a dozen steps.

Matthew was there alone.

He seemed to be half dozing over a newspaper.

But he looked up upon hearing a footstep.

Tom did not speak.

He merely made a sign with his hand.

Matthew comprehended it, though his face turned a shade paler as he hastened to open the door and admit his visitor.

As Tom entered, Matthew hastily pressed his hand, and then pointed to the door leading into the private room.

"I cannot stay above five minutes, Matthew," said Tom, as soon as this door was closed behind them.

"Is it really you or your ghost?"

"Myself."

"Then sit down by the fire. You are most welcome, though it spoils the pleasure I should feel in entertaining you when I think of the risk you run."

"Never mind it. I have got in unseen."

"Do you think so?" asked Matthew, eagerly.

"I am almost certain of it—I might say I am quite certain."

"Then that is good news, for I believe you can reckon yourself safe. It would be a strange and unlucky chance if we were interrupted now."

"Have the officers discontinued their attentions?"

"I have not seen one in the place for a longer period than I can remember to have passed without doing so, and yet when, hitherto, I have felt a sensation of security on this account I have invariably been disturbed soon afterwards."

"Then I hope that this instance will prove an exception."

"So do I, Tom. But tell me what urgent business it is



[TOM KING IS CAPTURED BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.]

that brings you here to-night. Have something to drink, however, before you begin to speak."

Old Matthew bustled about quickly, and soon placed some tempting refreshments before his guest, to whom, in good truth, they were most welcome.

"And you are sure you left them all sound and well?" he asked, referring to Dick Turpin and his associates.

"Quite sure."

"That, then, is good news. But come, you have not yet told me what brings you here to-night. It is something out of the common, I feel certain."

Tom King, in a very few words, explained his errand.

When he had finished, old Matthew nodded his head approvingly.

"I was thinking about them," he said, "and wondering what you would do."

"What think you of the plan?"

"It is excellent."

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"And you will see to the carrying out of your part of it?"

"I will, depend upon it. And what is more, I think I know a place where they can both get comfortable lodgings, and no questions asked. And in order that the suspicions of the police may be the better allayed, I will seem to hold no communication with them whatever."

"It will perhaps be quite as well."

"I am sure of it; and if Tom Davis and his wife and Ellen can get clear out of the country, I am sure it will be the best thing in the world for them."

"We are unanimous in our opinion in that respect. And now, Matthew, I will be off."

"What, so soon?"

"Yes. This is an atmosphere of danger for me to breathe, and I neither wish to bring you into trouble nor myself; besides—"

"Besides what?"

"I have left my horse outside in charge of a lad, and I told him that I should not be away many minutes."

"Outside?" ejaculated Matthew.

"Well, some little distance off, of course."

"Then I will send—"

"Nay—nay, it is not worth while."

"But I think it is. It will be safer."

"I don't know about that. I shall be back quickly; and what is more, I don't suppose the boy would surrender the horse to anyone but myself."

Old Matthew still hesitated.

How strange it was that Tom should decline this service!

If he had accepted it instead, the treachery of the boy and watchman would have been made apparent.

But it was not destined so to be.

Tom pressed the hand of his old and staunch friend very tightly; and, recommending him to do his best for Mrs. Davis and Ellen, he said farewell.

Old Matthew, however, would not allow him to depart until he had satisfied himself that there was no police officer on the watch outside.

He was absent some time; and when he returned, Tom said:

"Is all well?"

"I believe so. I can see no one."

"That is right. I will be off now. Once more, farewell!"

"Stay a bit," said Matthew.

"What for?"

"I will come a little way with you."

"Let me thank you all the same," answered Tom; "but, believe me, I feel that it would be best not to do so."

"Why so?"

"You might be observed; and I have no wish to bring danger upon you, as would be the case if you were found with me."

"Well, well, I feel you are right; and yet I have a strong desire to do something to serve you—to render you assistance; it is a feeling which I cannot at all comprehend."

Tom's only reply was a light and careless laugh, and the next moment he had passed through the doorway into the dark and silent street.

After his departure, Matthew's vague, uncomfortable sensation that something was going wrong grew stronger and stronger.

Still, the feeling was too vague for any decisive course of action to be produced from it, and so, in a state of mind the very reverse to pleasant, he resumed the perusal of the newspaper which the arrival of his unexpected guest had interrupted.

In the meantime, Tom King was rapidly making his way towards his destination.

Strange to say, his mind was filled with a sensation of security, much greater than that which he usually experienced.

Never for a moment did he believe that the boy had played him false.

In the first place, Tom felt almost certain that he had so well enwrapped his form that recognition was impossible; and in the second, he considered that, as the boy would be expecting him to return every moment, he would not venture to quit the spot where he had been left.

And so Tom hurriedly walked on.

He glanced perpetually from side to side, but without seeing anyone.

It almost seemed as though he was the sole pedestrian abroad that night.

What a pity it was, however, that there was no kind spirit to whisper in his ear some warning of his hidden danger!

But no.

He walked on, if possible, with a more confident step towards the fatal spot.

The footstep which the treacherous boy had heard approaching was indeed that of our old friend—now menaced by a more terrible danger than any which had threatened him during the entire course of his career, for now he was totally unprepared.

The officers at once placed themselves in readiness for instantaneous action.

Then they remained immovable, but listening with

the utmost intensity to the approach of the rapid footfall.

Nearer, nearer came the victim to the trap.

"Are you there?" they heard Tom say, as he drew closer, for so dark were the shadows round about the old gateway that he was unable to discern the form of his horse at any distance.

"Yes—yes!" answered the boy, striving hard to conceal the impatience which struggled to manifest itself in any way.

"Come this way then."

The boy made a show of leading the horse towards where Tom stood.

But the highwayman was too impatient and too anxious to sit to wait for this, so he advanced to his horse himself.

The boy held the reins tightly.

It almost seemed as though he grasped them on purpose to sunder himself, for he trembled so excessively that he seemed in imminent danger of falling to the ground.

But Tom was too busy to notice this.

Besides, the darkness of the night, to a great extent, prevented him from doing so.

His hand was on the saddle.

One foot was in the stirrup.

Another second, and he would have been mounted.

But before this second could elapse, the officers bounded forward.

In their excitement, all gave utterance to a suppressed cry of triumph and relief, which, forming one aggregate sound, came very strangely upon the ear indeed.

Before Tom knew where he was—

Before he could form the least idea of what had happened, he found himself grasped tightly in several places by many powerful hands.

Where his assailants had come from he could not guess.

Had they been dropped upon him from the clouds their appearance could not have been more sudden or more startling.

He had not even time to utter a cry, much more to raise a hand in his own defence.

It was just as the first shock of the surprise passed away, however, that he heard a voice cry:

"Tom King, you are our prisoner! You are safe—caught— nabbed! Keep yourself quiet, for resistance will only have the effect of bringing down ill treatment against you! However, you can please yourself! Our orders are to take you to Newgate dead or alive; and in onestate or other we'll do it, mind that! So you had better give in at once, and not be fool enough to make any fuss! Why don't you speak? Just let us know whether you are open to reason or not!"

CHAPTER MXLIV.

TOM KING IS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE POLICE OFFICERS.

FROM the moment the police officer had begun to speak, Tom King had remained profoundly still.

He had not attempted to make the least movement.

To all appearances, he was paying the utmost attention to what the officer said.

But Tom was quite willing that he should have gone on gabbling for some time longer, as during this period Tom was collecting his shattered thoughts.

This, under such circumstances as we have just related, was very far from being an easy task.

But Tom was used to surprises.

Great, therefore, as this one was, he rapidly recovered from it.

This much done, the next thought was to busy his brain as to the course of action he should take.

Here was subject for long and anxious deliberation indeed; but Tom had no more than a few fleeting seconds allowed him.

Nevertheless, even in that brief period he came to some kind of conclusion as to what he should do.

Already there was hovering in his mind the dull, dim outlines of a scheme which, if prosecuted, would release him from his foes.

He still remained silent, thinking deeply.

Resistance was out the question; and, moreover, it

was certain that if there seemed to be any chance of his getting away, they would not hesitate to fire a volley after him; and this, coming from so many weapons, and from so short a distance, could not fail to be fatal.

Tom knew the officers too well to believe that they would hesitate a moment about doing this.

The one who had spoken waited thus long for some kind of reply.

But finding none came, he said:

"Tom King, I see you surrender handsomely. Well, it is no more than I expected of you, so come along. It will be all over in a moment."

Tom King affected to be much cast down and over-come.

"Nay—nay," said the officers, "never be down-hearted! Keep up your courage! You must have known that, some day or other, it would come to this, so be game—be game to the last!"

Tom sighed, and appeared to be more dejected than before.

"Don't be down, I say! You have set us at defiance a long time, and now our turn has come."

"I feel it."

"No doubt you do; but it cannot be helped."

"You misapprehend me."

"Do I?"

"You do indeed."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Why, I feel that your turn has come to triumph, and that it will be all over with us now in a very little while."

"Very likely."

Tom was again silent.

"Now, then," cried the officer who had before spoken, "out with the dardies, and clap them on! Would you like a hackney-coach? I am willing to do the thing decent."

Tom really seemed as though this sudden blow of misfortune had paralysed him.

No one could have displayed more dejection.

But when the officers, in obedience to the injunctions of their leader, set about handcuffing him, he aroused himself.

"No—no," he said—"not that! There's no need for that! Have I not given into you quietly enough?"

"Very true, you have; but, then, you know, you are such a slippery customer that we should be greatly blamed if we omitted to take any one precaution."

"There's no need for it," said Tom—"no need at all. But I wish you would let me say a few words to you in private."

"What, now?"

"Yes; no other time will suit."

"Impossible!"

"I will give you my word not to try to get away. And if you refuse this request you will repent having done so to the longest day of your existence."

There was a peculiar earnestness, not to say solemnity, about the manner in which Tom King spoke, and the officer, in spite of himself, was greatly moved.

He at once became filled with curiosity to know what it was the celebrated highwayman had to communicate to him.

But he hesitated about giving his consent.

Curiosity, however, at length obtained the victory.

"I will take your word," he said.

"You have chosen wisely," answered Tom. "I just want to whisper something in your ear—that is all."

At a word from the one in command, the officers who held Tom released him.

But the chief held him by the arm, apparently only in the manner that one friend might hold another, but, in reality, his grasp was one that could not have been shaken off very easily.

Moreover, the other police officers held their pistols in readiness for instant use, so that, had the highwayman contemplated the perpetration of any treachery, he was denied the opportunity, for before he could get free such a volley would be fired after him as could not fail to cause his death, or at least inflict such serious hurts upon him as to render him incapable of motion.

But Tom's plan, as will be seen, was by far too elaborate and skilfully laid to have in it any such clumsiness as this.

Besides, he had given his word.

"Now, then," cried the officer to him, "what is it? Speak quickly!"

"I will. Listen."

"I am paying every attention."

"Well, I quite give into my fate—you understand that. But I am afraid it will go very hard with me."

"I'm afraid it will; I won't misrepresent matters."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"Well, go on."

"What I want to know is, whether it would be possible for me to do anything that would make things better?"

The officer shook his head.

"Don't you think I can?" Tom asked, in a most anxious tone.

"Well, you see, you have been so out-and-out. Nothing can save you from Tyburn, I fear."

Tom looked disappointed.

"You had got something to propose, hadn't you?" asked the officer, who fancied already that he could scent out something that would eventuate to his advantage.

"I had."

"Then let me hear it."

"What's the good? Come on; I am ready to go with you."

"You may as well let me know," continued the officer, with an eagerness which Tom had artfully elicited. "It can do no harm, you know."

"Nor good to me."

"Perhaps—who knows? At any rate, I could tell better if I heard your proposition."

Tom seemed undecided.

The officer repeated his request with additional eagerness.

"Well," said Tom, "the officers and the other authorities are very anxious to capture Dick Turpin, are they not?"

"I believe you."

"And Claude Duval?"

"Rather!"

"And Sixteen-String Jack?"

"Of course!"

"And there's Maud."

"Certainly."

"You are very anxious to capture them as well as myself?"

"Of course we are, though we can't manage to do it."

"You have failed hitherto," said Tom, with great gravity. "But now that you have nabbed me, I feel assured that the others will fall into your hands ere long."

"I hope so!"

"Now," said Tom, slightly sinking his voice, "do you think if I was to deliver them all into your hands, so that you could capture them without any trouble, that such a service would do anything towards getting me off lightly?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"Answer my question first."

"Then I should say it most certainly would."

"You really believe that it would influence the authorities and make them inclined to act leniently to me?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"What difference would it make?"

"Why, you would get off with transportation."

"Then, if you are agreeable, it shall be done."

"But I can't believe you are in earnest."

"Why not?"

"Because I have always been told that nothing would induce you highwaymen to prove false to one another—that you would die rather than betray."

"Yes, that has always been our rule; but, then, I can see very plainly now that they cannot escape much longer, so I think I might just as well reap some benefit by their capture as not."

"That is certainly a most sensible and businesslike way of looking at the matter," replied the officer; "and I should be the very last in the world to blame you for adopting such a course."

"I think no sensible person would blame me."

"Then, have you made up your mind?"

"I have. And now I want you to tell me how to proceed in the matter."

"Where are they all?"

"Lying in concealment, and waiting for my return. They will not move till I go back."

"Could we take them at unawares?"

"Easily."

"Have we sufficient force here?"

"I should think so. You would be able to take them by surprise as you did me."

The officer drew a long breath.

The prospect of taking prisoners Dick Turpin and all his companions in this manner was certainly dazzling, and no one could be surprised at the officer being considerably thrown off his guard by it.

He knew well how great was the aggregate reward, and thought what a first-rate thing it would be if it only had to be shared between him and his companions.

It must have been noticed more than once that the very magnitude of the reward offered for the apprehension of the highwaymen defeated its own object, as all officers were anxious to get as great a share as they could.

The leader of the present troop was not, however, altogether blind to caution, for he asked:

"But what guarantee have I that you will not play me false?"

Tom pretended to consider.

"I don't know what guarantee you can have; but I will tell you what I have been thinking, if you like."

"Very well."

"You will then see that the affair is left entirely in your own hands."

"All right, then," answered the officer, with a sigh of relief, "let me hear what you have to propose."

"Very well. In the first place, I should recommend you to obtain horses for yourself and your comrades. I can ride on my own; and I will take you all to the place where they are concealed, and where you can capture them with less trouble than you did me."

"That's the ticket! But I say."

"What?"

"If I trusted you to get on your horse again, how do I know but what you would take the first opportunity to bolt off?"

"You would be greatly to blame if you allowed me any such opportunity."

"I suppose I should. But then you are as slippery as an eel, and as cunning as a fox."

"You are complimentary."

"I am, if you choose to think so."

"But this is not the point."

"No, truly."

"First of all, do you consent—yes or no?"

The officer reflected for some moments, and then said:

"I will consult my companions."

"Do so. But shall you make the boy and the watchman party to it? They would be no good, and would only make two more to divide the reward amongst."

Tom could not have employed a more cogent argument than this.

"Leave them to me," said the officer. "I'll see to them, never fear."

Having spoken these words in a very confident tone, he moved off a step or two in order to consult with his companions, who were not a little curious and anxious to know what had passed between the prisoner and their chief.

They were not long left in ignorance.

Tom watched them with a keen eye.

Upon the decision arrived at depended his liberty and his life.

No prisoner standing in the dock waiting for the verdict of the jury could have suffered greater anxiety than he did.

And yet to have gazed upon him no one would have thought that he was even moved.

He was sorely tempted to try to make a run for it, but the recollection of the pistols held so handily by his foes, and the thought that they would in all probability assent to his proposal, induced him to remain firm.

Whether this was a chance he ought to have embraced or not would be hard indeed to say.

At any rate, be the case how it might, the chance was lost, for the chief officer came to him and said:

"My fellows are all inclined to agree to your proposal, though they could hardly believe at first that you were in earnest in intending to betray your companions, it was so foreign to your nature."

"It may be so," answered Tom, grimly, "but then you should always bear in mind that circumstances alter cases."

"That is very true."

"But do they consent?"

"With one condition they do."

"What is it?"

"That you suffer yourself to be bound upon your horse in a secure manner, and ride in the midst of us."

This was a difficulty.

Tom hardly saw his way out of it, though, for all that, he said, offhand:

"I think it a pity you lot cannot mind me without putting me to so much pain and inconvenience."

"They have such an opinion of your abilities."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Why, then, they recommend that we take you direct to Newgate, and so make sure of you, at all events. And this is what I should do, for I am one of those who firmly believe that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Now the reader must know already that, in spite of all he had said, Tom's ultimate idea and intention was escape.

The mere fact of his being bound on his horse's back would materially impede the carrying out of this project, and yet, how was he to avoid it?

He might have given his solemn word not to attempt to get free, and doubtless, had he done so, the officers would have been satisfied; but that would by no means have agreed with Tom's intentions, for he placed too high a value upon his word ever to break the pledge, no matter what the circumstances might be.

Clearly, however, it was better to consent to any terms, no matter how hard, so long as he got further away from Newgate, than it would be voluntarily to consign himself to a cell in Newgate, from whence there would be scarcely the faintest shadow of a hope of effecting his liberation.

"We sha'n't put you to any pain, that I know of," continued the officer, "and not to any more inconvenience than we can help. We shall just secure you with a rope to prevent you from giving us the slip, and no more."

"Well," said Tom, "if you won't trust me, why, of course I must submit, and I hope that will go a little way towards convincing you that I am quite in earnest."

"It will certainly."

"Then send for some horses, and we will be off at once. But for your own sakes keep the matter quiet."

"You trust me."

Immediately after this, one of the officers was, after many injunctions, despatched to fetch the requisite number of horses to accommodate the troop.

The watchman and the boy were aware something of a peculiar character was going on, but the officers took particularly good care that they should not find out what.

The chief took advantage of the absence of his subordinate to address a few words to them.

As for the watchman, he was soon disposed of.

No sort of stipulation or agreement had been entered into with him whatever, and therefore he was abundantly satisfied upon receiving half-a-crown in return for his trouble.

But with the boy it was different.

His eyes looked brighter—

His face more hungry-like than ever, owing to the expression of preternatural acuteness which rested upon it.

"Now, my lad," said the officer, "will you take a certain sum down for your share in this affair, and be off about your business?"

"Oh?"

"You know very well what I said; and if you don't, I ain't going to repeat it."

"Well, then, I will take one-seventh part of the amount of the reward offered."

"Oh, will you, indeed?"

"Yes, certainly. That was what we agreed upon."

"Very well. You mean to say you will be quite content with that?"

"Yes, I shall."

"Then come to me at the police office in the morning and you shall have the amount."

"But I shall go with you to Newgate and see him safely lodged."

"Well, that you can please yourself about; but we are going out on some business that does not concern you in any degree."

The boy opened his eyes a trifle wider as he said, with remarkable determination:

"I'm going with you!"

"Are you?"

"I am!"

"Then you will have to do so in the best way you are able. I don't intend to find accommodation for you; and, what is more, you had better be civil if you are wise, for, remember, you have not got the money yet, and I shall have a share in the paying of it."

At this moment the clatter of horses' hoofs became audible, importing that the officer was returning.

CHAPTER MXLV.

RELATES THE SURPRISING ADVENTURES OF TOM KING AND THE OFFICERS.

THIS last speech of the officer's seemed to furnish the boy with food for reflection, for he remained perfectly silent.

Tom was busily engaged in thought.

The horses were soon opposite the gateway, and the one who had been despatched to fetch them showed a piece of long, strong rope that he had brought as well.

"That's the ticket!" said one of his companions, seizing upon this article with evident satisfaction.

There was now a scene of great bustle and excitement.

The horses were soon ready.

The officer with the rope advanced, and, having formed a running noose in the middle of it, he put it over Tom's head and brought it down to his waist.

He was about to draw it tight, in such a manner that Tom's arms would be confined to his sides at the elbow.

This he strongly protested against, and after some discussion the rope was merely secured round his waist, and his arms were not confined at all.

This much having been done, he was requested to mount his steed.

He did this with an alacrity that was unfeigned.

Two officers then took hold of the ends of the rope and mounted their steeds also.

Then placing themselves abreast with Tom, they took firm hold of the rope.

"I hope now you have me secure," said Tom, with a forced laugh. "At any rate, if I go anywhere I shall have to take the pair of you with me."

The officers echoed his laugh with great spirit, for they were much delighted at their extraordinary cleverness.

The others now mounted, two going in front and two following in the rear.

Thus hemmed in, it certainly did not seem possible for any human being to escape.

Tom thought so too, and wondered in what way and to what extent Fortune intended to favour him.

How he was to get free he was still unable to make out.

During the ride which was about to ensue, however, he considered he should have some opportunities for reflection, and he trusted that his brain would furnish him with an expedient that would enable him to achieve his purpose.

To start with, however, there was one payable fact.

This was, that while he retained his present position, to get away was impossible, except by the intervention of some miracle, and Tom was not foolish enough to believe that any miracle would be wrought in his behalf.

"Now," said the chief officer, "are you all ready to start?"

"Yes," was the unanimous answer.

"Forward, then, and let us go as fast as we can just at first, so as to get rid of that boy in case he should try to follow us."

"Keep the Oxford Road," said Tom King—"ride along it till I tell you to turn off."

This direction was clear and easy to be carried out.

The boy, seeing them all start, started too.

No doubt he had great faith in his power of wind and rapidity of motion.

But his vanity, if so we may term it, received a check.

The officers started off at full gallop; and after running for some distance, the boy, with a bowl of vexation and despair, was forced to confess himself beaten.

It was hard indeed that he should see the highwayman go out of his sight.

But what could he do?

He was unable to prevent it.

He was panting and exhausted, and so he sat down to think.

Leaving him thus engaged, we will follow in the steps of the police officers and Tom King.

They did not long maintain the rate of speed with which they had commenced their journey.

When they slackened, however, they took good care that they should surround Tom as closely as ever.

The officer who had thought of the device of the rope did nothing but chuckle about it; and Tom wished that so clever a personage was at the bottom of the sea, as perhaps but for this he could have given them the slip.

Still, as he rode along in company with his captors, Tom could not help feeling a very great degree of satisfaction.

Looking back, it seemed scarcely credible that the officers should have brought him right away from London, when they had him so near to a place of detention.

There can be no doubt, however, that the officers were firmly persuaded that, let what would happen, they were on the safe side.

Even supposing they should fail to capture the others, they knew they should have Tom safe, and they trusted to their own ingenuity and sagacity to keep him secure.

And certainly, looking calmly at the matter, it did seem much easier for them to do this than for Tom to escape.

However, we shall soon see how all fared by watching the progress of events.

They had now performed a considerable distance, London being so far behind that they might with justice call themselves quite in the country.

The leader of the troop began to grow impatient.

"Is it much further?" he asked.

"Not very far," answered Tom, who up to this moment had by no means made up his mind where he was to take them.

At any rate, it would not be anywhere in the vicinity of the Jolly Tar Inn, for Tom was resolved if he could not get free himself he would not be the cause of bringing trouble and danger upon his comrades.

"What kind of a place is it?" persisted the officer.

"Surely you can give us some description of it?"

Tom could not very well get out of this, and, simple as it seemed, this was a great danger, and one that he had altogether omitted to take into account.

To be sure, it would be easy enough to draw upon his imagination for the description of some unexisting place, but then there was the difficulty of finding a place that would accord with his description.

"Can't you wait?" he asked, pretending to laugh.

"You will know when you see it."

"But why not tell us?"

"Why should I?"

"Is it in a wood?"

"Yes."

"A cave?"

"Well, not exactly a cave, but do wait a few minutes longer, and I will show you."

The officer was silent, and Tom rejoiced to think he had got off so easily, for, as will be seen, he had not pledged himself to anything definite.

He racked his brain more than ever in order to decide upon some course of action, but in vain.

Morning, too, was coming on, and he was conscious that by daylight his chance of effecting his liberation would be materially lessened.

It seemed advisable, then, to take some speedy and decisive step, could he but resolve upon its nature.

Gazing before him, he saw in the distance a great mass of trees.

In his excursions he had noticed them many a time, but he had never been very near to them.

From their appearance, however, it was tolerably clear that they formed a portion of a wood of considerable extent.

The conclusion which our friend now came to was that while he remained on horseback he stood no chance whatever of effecting his purpose.

But how was he to alight and to induce his companions to do likewise?

The wood seemed to promise to answer this purpose, and so desperate had Tom King by this time become that he was resolved to dally no longer.

Accordingly, looking towards the trees, he asked:

"Do you see that wood yonder?"

"Yes. Is that the place?"

"It is."

"Then it is time to quit the high-road?"

"Yes; you will find the road easy enough across the meadows."

Just then the officers happened to be opposite a gate leading into the fields.

This gate one of the officers, having dismounted, threw open.

A succession of green, undulating meadows alone divided them from the wood to which Tom had pointed.

To ride across these was, of course, no harder than to journey along the high-road.

The excitement of the officers was now wound up to too great a pitch to allow them to speak.

For this Tom was thankful, for a succession of inquisitive questions could not have failed to embarrass him.

The border of the wood was quickly reached.

The trees did not grow here so closely together as to make it necessary for the party to dismount.

But Tom led the way to the thickest place he could find.

The officers seemed unwilling to quit their steeds, and so forced a way as far as they were able, but at length the extreme density of the vegetation compelled them to come to a halt.

"What are we to do now?" asked the leader.

"Dismount," answered Tom, laconically.

"But our horses?"

"You must leave them here with some one to mind them."

"But is there no means of getting to this place without quitting our saddles?"

"None whatever. Do you think Dick Turpin would take up his quarters at a place that you could drive a carriage and four into?"

This was not deemed at all likely, so, after the expression of much disapproval, the officers dismounted.

They were most careful to keep a sharp look-out upon Tom, whom they surrounded even more closely than ever.

"You seem greatly afraid of me," he said.

"So we ought to be, considering who you are and where we are. Rely upon it, we are not going to let you slip through our fingers as others have done."

"But you are not going to keep this rope round me, surely?"

"Indeed but we are!"

"It will be most awkward to get through the trees in this fashion."

"It cannot be helped, for we do not intend to proceed in any other manner."

"Well, as you will," replied Tom, resignedly. "I can perform my part of the affair."

The two officers who held the ends of the rope that was fastened round Tom's waist seemed to fix their hands for even a firmer grasp than they had yet maintained.

Hemmed in, then, by his foes even more closely than when on horseback, the little strangely-assorted party forced their way among the tangled brushwood.

At every step they took it became darker and darker, for the tall trees cast deep shadows about their roots.

Still, Tom could not help admitting to himself the dis-

agreeable fact that he was about as far from the accomplishment of his design as ever.

He fancied, too, that the officers regarded him suspiciously, as though they had an idea that he was not acting in good faith towards them.

Perhaps it was Tom's own conscience—which is ever its own accuser—made him fancy this.

The crisis had arrived, however.

The next few moments would either show him a free man or else the officers would discover the deception that had been practised upon them.

The latter seemed to be more probable than the former.

Tom pressed his teeth together hard, and, looking keenly round him, resolved to embrace the first opportunity that presented itself.

But he watched in vain.

All at once, to his disappointment and dismay, they emerged into a considerable space that was quite bare of trees.

The officers gave vent to exclamations of surprise.

Tom was no less astonished, but he concealed the state of his feelings tolerably well.

He continued to advance with a confident step across the clearing.

The ground around now partook of quite a rocky character.

Ere they had gone many yards, they found themselves on the brink of what could not be termed anything but a precipice.

They came upon it suddenly, owing to the manner in which the ground sloped upwards, thus preventing them from knowing what laid in their path until they were within a few steps of the verge of the abyss.

"Hullo!" cried the chief officer. "D—n me if this isn't a rum place you have brought us to! Where are we to go now?"

Tom could not tell himself.

But he retained his confidence admirably.

"This way," he said, and he approached a little closer to the brink of the chasm.

He took in at one glance the features of the scene around him, and at the same time resolved upon the course he should adopt.

But before relating it we must give a brief description of the spot.

At the foot of the abyss we have mentioned flowed a current of water—too wide to be called a brook, and yet scarcely important-looking enough to be designated a river.

It was probably a woodland stream which was greatly swollen by rains, for it rushed along almost with the violence and rapidity of a torrent.

Where this stream came from could not be discerned; but it flowed beneath a rude kind of archway in some rocks.

The depth to the surface of this water from where Tom and the officers stood was close upon twenty feet.

"Which is the way?" asked the officers again.

"This," was Tom's reply.

At the moment he spoke, he summoned up all his energies, and gave a tremendous bound forward.

He had observed that the rope was held scarcely so tightly as it had been, for the officers seemed disinclined to stand too near to the brink, and doubtless they thought Tom would not venture to go closer.

But his sudden movement took them completely by surprise.

They had the chance either of releasing their hold or plunging over the abyss with their prisoner.

They chose the former course.

The rope slipped through their fingers, and the highwayman disappeared.

There was a general shout, and then the one in command came as close to the edge of the precipice as he dared, and looked down.

He caught sight of Tom in the water.

He was either swimming or else being carried along by the current.

It was scarcely light enough to distinguish which.

"We have not lost him yet," he screamed—"not yet! Follow me! We shall have him after all! It is impossible for him to escape!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE UNPARALLELED ADVENTURES
OF TOM KING.

NOTHING but the knowledge of the fact that his life was at stake, and that this was his only chance of escape, could have induced Tom King to adopt so perilous an expedient as the one we have described.

He was, in fact, just then rendered desperate, as he greatly feared that the officers would suspect he was only playing with them.

He trusted that the depth of the stream would be sufficient to preserve him from any injury, and certainly the tremendous rapidity with which the water rushed along would serve to keep him from reaching the bottom very easily.

He scarcely hoped, however, that he should be able to snatch the rope from the hands of the officers.

Still, he had no doubt that if he carried them over the abyss he should have little difficulty in disentangling himself as soon as he reached the water.

This trouble, as it happened, was saved him.

The rapid descent through the air deprived Tom of breath, and upon plunging into the stream he was partially deprived of consciousness.

Still, he was sensible of a sharp shock of pain, and instantly afterwards, actuated by instinct, he was battling with his arms.

The great force of the current carried him rapidly along without any effort on his part.

The only exertion he had to make was that requisite to keep his head above the surface of the water.

This was a comparatively easy matter.

The intense coldness of the water seemed to have a reviving and stimulating effect upon him.

His brain grew clearer each second.

He could hear the cries of his pursuers.

Whereabouts they were situated he could not tell, nor did he make any particular endeavour to inquire.

They were in his rear, and that sufficed.

Then a shadow seemed to fall upon him.

Looking up, he perceived a huge, ragged mass of rock.

Before him was the rudely-formed arch to which we have already adverted.

The force of the stream was drawing swiftly to it, and at the prospect he could not repress a shudder—

It seemed to him that if he once passed under, he should be hurried into the very bowels of the earth.

He tried to arrest his course.

But the effort was a vain one.

He had not the strength to cope with so large a body of water.

He drifted beneath the arch.

The effect was as though he had plunged from day into the darkest night.

But just as he passed under he heard a loud cry behind which he felt assured was given utterance to by the officers upon seeing him disappear.

The loudness of the cry convinced him that they could not be far off, so that had he succeeded in arresting his course at the moment he wished to do so, he would have fallen again into the hands of his foes; for in his present condition, it was next to impossible that he would be able to cope successfully with so many.

Of the two, then, he infinitely preferred drifting beneath the rocks to becoming again a prisoner.

Whether or not he should ever again see the light of day was a question which he could not answer.

He had often heard of streams which had thus rushed under mountains and which have never been known to emerge again.

To what point those waters might flow was a thing unknown to man—perhaps they went to feed some huge reservoir in the centre of the earth.

These and other strange speculations flitted across Tom's brain in a space of time that would have appeared incredibly brief had the rapidity of thought not been well-known.

How long it was after entering this subterranean passage that he became aware pieces of rock were hanging pendent from the roof he could not tell.

It must have been only a few moments, however.

The thought at once occurred to him that if he could

manage in his rapid course to seize upon one of these stalactites, he might be able to arrest his further progress, and remain there until the officers had taken their departure from the vicinity.

No sooner did this thought strike him than he endeavoured to carry it into effect.

The first he attempted to catch hold of eluded his grasp, for the water rushing continually against the rockwork rendered it as smooth as ice.

But it seemed, nevertheless, to check the tremendous speed at which, up to that moment, he had been going.

For this reason he had all the better chance of seizing the next.

He did so, and, to his extreme satisfaction, succeeded in achieving his purpose.

Clinging tightly to the slippery object, he, after many struggles, succeeded in getting upon his feet.

Even then it required no trifling amount of exertion to maintain an upright posture.

But it was a great relief thus to be freed from the rude buffetings of the water, for now that he stood up the water did not reach up so high as his waist.

The officers, to whose proceedings we now for a moment or two return, instantly followed their leader, who took his course in the direction of the very archway of which we have had occasion so many times to make mention.

His quick eye had descried a path by means of which he would be able to descend to this point.

He had, however, to take a very circuitous route, so that before he could reach this point, Tom King drifted out of sight.

It was then that they set up the cry which floated along the surface of the water to the ears of our old friend.

They crowded as closely as they could round the mouth of the arch, and, stooping down, they endeavoured to see what lay beyond.

But they could see nothing but darkness.

"This is a rum job," said one—"blow me if it ain't! I should think he must be mad, or he would never have taken such a jump as that—and to go under there too! Why it seems to go into the very middle of the earth!"

"I believe," said another, "that he was insensible from the fall, and drifted under here without knowing where he was going."

"At any rate," said the chief, "I will find out whether he is hiding just a little way under in the dark."

"Do you think he is?" asked one of his companions.

"I do—he would scarcely venture to follow the stream. Stand aside!"

With these words, he came nearer to the arch.

"Tom King," he said, "I believe you are hiding close at hand. If you are, come forth, for if you don't show yourself we will fire a volley upon you, and we shall have the reward all the same, you know."

No answer whatever was vouchsafed to this speech, though the officer waited for one for several seconds.

"Now, boys," he said, "make ready, and give it him all together!"

The officers had their pistols ready, and at once levelled them in obedience to this command.

"Keep your barrels low," said the chief. "Now fire!"

A scattering discharge followed, for the police officers were not well enough practised to fire off a volley with military exactness.

The smoke obscured everything for a short time, but when it had dispersed, and when the many rattling echoes which the discharge of the firearms had called forth had died away, there was no change visible in the aspect of affairs.

"I'll follow him," said the chief, in tones of determination—"yes, if you have to ride a hundred miles to fetch a boat! Go, three of you, at once upon this errand, and I will wait here with the rest till you come back."

We now return to Tom.

He heard distinctly the orders given by the chief of the police officers, and as soon as ever he found they were about to fire a volley he at once took what he thought would be effectual means to secure his safety.

He had all at once recollected the rope which was secured to his waist, which of course would assist him in retaining his hold.

He thought he should be able to lash himself tightly

to the pendent piece of rock, and in such a manner that he could stoop down altogether under the water, which would of course shield him from all injury.

This manœuvre he proceeded at once to carry into execution.

The volley was fired.

Just at that moment, however, from some cause he could not discover, the rope gave way, and he found himself whirled round and then carried along the stream with additional velocity.

Whether it was that he had failed to secure the rope properly, or whether the rock was of too slippery a character to afford a hold, he could not tell.

It might be, too, that the concussion of the atmosphere in so confined a space, consequent upon the discharge of so many firearms, had had the effect of loosening the stalactite in its setting.

No matter from what cause, however, Tom found himself being whirled along in the manner we have mentioned.

The consequence of this was that he failed to overhear what the officer in command said about a boat.

Louder and louder roared the water.

Faster and faster, too, it flowed, for its channel kept continually getting more and more constricted.

Tom made continual frantic efforts to seize upon the rocks as he rushed by them.

He broke his nails and lacerated his fingers in the attempt, but without succeeding.

Then suddenly he experienced a sharp, heavy blow upon the head, and then after that all was a blank.

The blow had been given by a mass of down-hanging rock against which his head, being raised in his endeavour to check his course, came into violent contact.

Not more than a second, however, appeared to elapse before he opened his eyes again.

How long he had remained unconscious was, however, a thing about which he could form no sort of idea whatever.

He looked about him at first vacantly and dreamily.

Then a voice—yes, surely a human voice—sounded in his ears.

That did more towards bringing Tom to his senses than anything else could.

A voice meant danger.

Accordingly, he made a tremendous effort to regain his footing, for he was aware that he was no longer in the water.

In this attempt it is not likely he would have been successful, however, had not some one's hands grasped him tightly and assisted him to rise.

By the time he was in an erect posture, Tom had recovered the use of his senses, and was able to take full cognizance of all that was going on around him.

At first he was so amazed at the strange character of the objects he beheld that he was at a loss to know whether he was really awake or dreaming.

Looking around, he first of all made the discovery that he was standing in the midst of a huge, almost circular, dome-like chamber.

The sides were composed of masses of rugged rock, which in some places glittered and shone resplendently, as though some one had been busy covering them with gems and burnished gold.

But the glittering, as Tom perceived, had its origin in the light falling upon certain places where the rockwork was prismatic.

How high this cavern was he could form no accurate conception, for a kind of luminous, misty cloud concealed the topmost portion of the dome altogether.

There was also a strange vibration of the earth and a deafening, rushing noise.

This he quickly found to be caused by the impetuous current of the stream, which rushed into the cavern with great violence.

Then there was a kind of mimic waterfall, close to the base of which was a sheet of nearly placid water of considerable extent, and finally there was another rude arch, beneath which the turbulent water once more escaped.

These were the most striking features of the place in which Tom thus strangely and unexpectedly found himself, and such as he was able to take in and comprehend by giving one glance around him.

But the being in whose grasp he still was?

Who was that?

Tom wrenched himself round with considerable violence—with much more, indeed, than there was any necessity for him to make use of, and consequently he staggered and nearly fell again.

Then his eyes encountered one of the most singular beings in human shape that he had ever looked upon.

It was a man whose age would be the most difficult thing to guess at, for the whole of his face was thickly covered with grizzly, bristly hair, which had the appearance of being totally neglected.

The same thing, too, might have been said of his head, for the hair upon it was inextricably matted together, and hung down in tangled masses upon his back and shoulders.

His clothing was torn and tattered in a thousand places, and so faded and so worn that scarcely a guess could have been hazarded as to its original condition.

He regarded Tom with a look by no means unfriendly, though he seemed not a little surprised at the rough treatment to which he had been subjected.

Observing with what astonishment Tom gazed upon him, the singular figure spoke.

"You are amazed to see me here, no doubt," he said, in a low, constrained, sad voice; "but not more so than I am to behold you in this place, for I believe that since the creation of the world we are the only human beings who have ever stood beneath this roof."

"You speak truly," said Tom, "I am amazed indeed. But how chances it that you are here?"

The stranger smiled sadly.

"You shall know," he said. "We shall have ample time for explanation and communication with each other. We are destined to become better acquainted than we are now."

"How so? Your words must be, I think, needlessly enigmatical."

"They shall be so, then, no longer. Let me ask you whether you did not by an accident find yourself in the power of the current, and whether you were not helplessly carried beneath a rude natural archway at the base of a mass of rock?"

"Such was the case," answered Tom. "But why do you ask? How did you surmise it?"

"Because that is just how I, long, long ago, was carried into this place."

Tom started, for a fearful, horrible supposition began to force itself upon his mind.

"And why have you remained?" said Tom, though when he asked the question he dreaded to hear the reply to it.

"Because I have not been able to leave."

"Why not?"

"I am kept a prisoner."

"By whom?"

"By these masses of rugged rock."

"You still speak in enigmas," said Tom, endeavouring to maintain his usual calmness.

"Then I will speak plainly, and in a few words you shall know the worst. And yet before I speak, let me desire you to summon up to your aid all the fortitude which you possess."

"I am prepared."

"Then, as I have said, I was caught by the current and carried under the arch. I had been out with a boat, and had been expressly warned against this place; but I was in the vortex before I was aware of it."

"And how did you escape?"

"By a merciful providence I was thrown up on the shore here, if I may so call it. Luckily, I had sufficient strength and sense to drag myself completely out of the water."

"And do you mean to assert," said Tom, glancing around, "that there is no means of exit from this place?"

"None whatever."

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, as a man would try whose object was to free himself from a lifelong solitary imprisonment."

Tom drew a long breath.

He knew what an incentive such a motive as the stranger had expressed would be



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD AT THE TURNPIKE GATE.]

Yet *Tina* was not satisfied.

Up to this moment the exciting nature of the extraordinary events which had just occurred had prevented him from thinking at all about the officers, but the word imprisonment had served as a key-note to bring him to his recollection.

He listened.

No sound, however, reached his ear to indicate that such persons as police officers had existence even.

That they would follow him seemed in the highest degree doubtful.

The consideration of this contingency, however, suggested another thought, and he asked, quickly:

"Have you never tried to leave this place by the same route as that by which you entered it?"

"I have. That was the most obvious course."

"It is impossible, then."

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"It is."

"Why?"

"Because just where the stream enters the cavern the violence of the current is so tremendous that it is altogether impossible to stand against it. I have tried and tried again and again, as you may easily suppose I should when I discovered that there was no other chance of leaving."

"But where does the water flow?"

"Through another low and narrow arch yonder; it is at the opposite extremity of the cavern."

"And where does that lead?"

"Heaven knows," answered the stranger, with a shudder. "For aught that I can tell, it may flow miles into the earth, or, what is more likely, it may by some underground course empty itself into the sea. Look, the ocean must at one time have rolled where we now stand."

and this huge chamber, doubtless, was hollowed out by the never-ceasing rushing of waves carried on for countless ages."

While making this impressive speech, the stranger had picked up from the floor of the cavern what seemed to be a handful of coarse sand.

But upon investigation, Tom found that it consisted of numberless shells—some merely fragments, and others quite entire.

"You amaze me," said Tom, gazing around him with admiration. "I had no conception of the existence of such a place."

The stranger sighed.

"Under other circumstances," he said, "a close and diligent examination of this cavern would have afforded me infinite delight; as it is, it has served to while away the tedium of many, many hours."

"And have you been long in this place?"

"So long that I have lost the computation of time, for I know not the day, the month, nor even the year. I had lost all hope of ever beholding one of my fellow-creatures again; and when, a short time ago, I saw you floating in the water, no words can describe my sensations."

These disclosures produced a dull, stupified effect upon Tom King.

He could not thoroughly realise the awful nature of his situation.

Perhaps the manner of the stranger tended in no small degree to produce this feeling, for he spoke with the calmness and resignation of one who knows that what he utters is a foregone conclusion.

By his manner he was evidently fully convinced that it was not in the power of human beings to effect an escape from that place.

Tom was not so assured of this, however, and, in spite of his disagreeable position, he could not help experiencing considerable satisfaction at having thus escaped from the power of his foes.

All things are judged by contrasts, and therefore, by comparison, Tom did not feel that discontent which any other person would have exhibited who was not similarly situated to himself.

That his enemies would have the boldness to penetrate to his present retreat, he did not for one moment believe.

Nor was Tom in any immediate hurry to make the attempt to get free, lest in succeeding he should again fall into their power.

The stranger was not a little astonished at Tom's indifference, and at length he was compelled to remark:

"You must be no ordinary man to treat this matter so calmly. I should have imagined that so dreadful a prospect as imprisonment for life would have filled you with despair."

"I don't know that I am very different to other people," answered Tom; "but, for one thing, I do not very readily yield myself to despair."

"Ah! I see now how it is—you are incredulous; and you do not believe that you are threatened with such a fate as I have mentioned."

"I do not doubt one word you have said; but I confess I shall be much better satisfied of the impossibility of quitting this place when I have tried my best to do so and failed."

The stranger looked at him with compassion.

"Believe me," he said, "this hope you cherish is a delusive one. Had escape been possible, do you think I should have remained here thus, sundered from all who hold me dear, and who must ever remain in ignorance of my miserable fate?"

Tom did not reply, but, feeling by this time something like himself, proceeded to look around the cavern in which he had been so strangely cast.

The stranger followed in his steps.

He really felt the deepest sensations of pity for our friend, for he knew how long it was before he could bring his mind to a realisation of the dreadful fact that he was entombed alive.

He remembered what he suffered at the time when all hope was extinguished, and he deeply compassionated our old friend.

But then this stranger did not know Tom's indomitable resolution, and doubtless the reader feels most

strongly convinced that the impediments would be of no ordinary character that would prevent him from once more working his way to the surface of the earth.

Suddenly Tom stopped.

"I have just been wondering," he exclaimed, "how you manage to obtain food in this subterranean place. Of course there must be some means of doing so, or you would not be in existence at the present moment; but what it can be completely puzzles me."

"I am confined to one particular kind of diet—a thing which, under some circumstances, would no doubt be deemed a hardship, but it is infinitely better than starvation."

"But what is it? I am filled with the utmost curiosity to know."

"Why, that pool or lake yonder—whichever you think fit to call it—abounds with fish, and, fortunately for me, they are easily captured."

"And is this the only means of support you have had?"

"It is indeed."

Tom half shuddered.

Such a life as the stranger described having led must in good truth have been a dreadful one.

But Tom at present was animated and inspired by the belief that he could, if he made the attempt, release himself.

Whether this belief was well founded or not will soon be seen.

He examined the interior of the cavern with great curiosity, looking closely into every nook and corner, for all that he saw was new and strange.

In one nook he came upon the remnants of a fire.

Only a few white-looking embers remained, and they seemed on the very point of utter extinction.

"That must have been one great comfort and consolation," remarked Tom, pointing to it.

"It has been indeed, but will be no longer," was the answer given, with the deepest dejection.

"Indeed! How so?"

"Why, when I first drifted into this place, being a smoker, I had the means about me of producing a light readily. From time to time, quantities of dead leaves, twigs, and other rubbish had accumulated in various corners; with these I made a fire. I thought the supply of material would be inexhaustible; but I have discovered my error. The last morsel has been used."

"Then a sojourn here in future will be even more uncomfortable than it has been hitherto?"

"It will," answered the stranger, with a sympathetic shiver, "for in the gloomy winter time the nights here are fearfully cold, owing, I suppose, to the presence of so large a body of water."

Tom said no more, but continued his exploration.

He paused for some time before the archway through which he had been carried.

Here the water issued with such tremendous rapidity and violence that it seemed to be boiling.

Never before had Tom beheld so impetuous a current.

The stranger stood silently by his side.

"It would be an achievement of no ordinary difficulty, would it not, to attempt to force a passage in defiance of such a stream as that? What chance, think you, would you have of retaining a footing there?"

"It would be impossible to do so unaided," replied Tom, after a few moments' reflection; "but I am far from feeling convinced that it would be impossible for us, by our united means, to overcome even a greater obstacle than this."

In spite of his belief that there was no hope of release, and in spite, also, of thinking that this conviction was firmly impressed upon his mind, a slight flush of colour tinged the stranger's cheeks.

Tom noticed it; but made no comment.

His thought just then reverted to his foes.

He wondered whether they had abandoned the pursuit as hopeless.

He fancied they must have done so.

Whether the police officers would be mad enough to trust themselves in a boat to thread the intricacies and encounter the unknown perils of this subterranean stream time alone can show.

At any rate, he could not distinguish above the roaring

of the water any sound indicative of their approach.

The spot upon which he had been standing was considerably above the level of the other portions of the cavern floor, to reach which it was necessary to make their way down a winding path.

The water, however, rushed off the brink of a kind of precipice, and fell with great force into a kind of basin, thus forming that mimic waterfall of which we have already spoken.

The water whirled round for some time, and finally expanded itself into a pool, the surface of which, by comparison, was almost calm.

It was from here, as the stranger had said, his only food had been obtained, and Tom, as he looked down at the water, could see multitudes of one kind of fish disporting themselves.

Passing on, Tom came at last to the other outlet of the water.

This area closely resembled the one at the other side of the cavern; but it was higher and wider, and the water did not rush through with so much swiftness, though, as he stood listening and looking down the dark passage, he fancied he could hear a commotion of waters like that which would be produced by another waterfall.

Whether this was so or not, he was unable to determine, for the darkness which prevailed just within the arch was such as to seem of a tangible character—an actual substance—instead of something merely produced by the absence of light.

CHAPTER MXLVII.

TOM KING MAKES A MOST DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN.

STILL continuing to look down, Tom indulged in many speculations as to the course which the headstrong stream would probably take.

The idea which his new-found companion had expressed concerning it seemed to be a very probable one indeed.

As he gazed, nothing seemed more likely than that this watercourse poured itself into some inner chamber of the earth.

He was compelled, too, to admit that the aspect of things did not promise well for the success of an escape.

But for all that, our old friend was not downhearted.

Had he been confined in the innermost dungeon of Newgate, with his limbs loaded with irons, and with the closest guard kept upon him by his jailors, he would not have looked upon self-liberation as impossible, and would have essayed his best to regain his freedom.

In comparison with such a task as this, the escape from a cavern seemed absolutely trifling.

The stranger watched Tom's countenance very closely, striving to read all the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

Although he would not admit it even to himself, Tom's confident manner had done much towards enlivening that hope which the stranger fully believed was quite extinct in his breast—namely, that, after all, it might be possible once again to look upon the surface of the earth.

"What think you of the prospect now?" he asked, in a voice which he strove hard to make seem indifferent. "Do you find that I have exaggerated the position?"

"Not much," said Tom. "I confess the situation is unpromising enough. Still, I can assure you that I shall use every effort to get away, nor shall I be at all particular in what I attempt, as I shall feel it is better to lose life in such a cause than passively sit down here and linger out a miserable existence."

"You are right," answered the stranger, "and I ought not to have shrunk so much from risking my life as I have done."

Tom did not reply, but looked narrowly at the walls of the cavern, as though with a view of forming some estimate of the probability of finding a means of scaling them.

The stranger, observing him, added:

"In what way shall you make your first attempt?"

"I can scarcely answer that question yet," replied Tom King, thoughtfully.

"But you were thinking about scaling the walls."

"I was wondering whether such a thing was possible, because up above there must be numerous crevices and fissures, or else how would this light penetrate here?"

"There can be no doubt about the existence of such fissures as you describe; but then the walls are so perfectly perpendicular and smooth, that I do not see how they can be climbed."

"We shall see better after awhile," was Tom's answer. "But if all other means fail, there is one which I shall have desperation enough to hazard."

"What is that?"

Tom did not verbally reply, but raised his finger and pointed to the dark cavernous arch through which the water seethed.

"You do not mean that you would commit yourself to that torrent?"

"I should. But let me tell you that would be the last resource."

"I should think so," replied the stranger, with a shudder. "It would be a desperate chance indeed."

"Yet I should think it preferable to long years of imprisonment in this place, and then perhaps at the end a painful death by starvation and cold."

"But consider," said the stranger: "you know not even that this watercourse conducts to freedom. Then how horrible the idea of imagining oneself hurried with breathless rapidity through intense darkness, and borne, it may be, into the very centre of the earth."

"I admit all that; but I should not think it any more horrible than the contingency to which I have just referred."

To this the stranger made no answer, and Tom King now set about the task of scrutinising every portion of the wall.

He considered that by now a sufficient length of time had elapsed to warrant him in taking steps for his liberation, as he thought the chances were he should hear no more of the police officers.

Could he but succeed in getting away from his present most undesirable quarters, he felt he should indeed have ample grounds for self-congratulation, while the intense and utter disappointment suffered by the police officers would always furnish him with a mirthful subject.

An examination of every portion of the cavern's walls impressed Tom strongly with the conviction that, situated as they were, it was hopeless to think of scaling them.

"No matter," he said, "my resources are not exhausted yet; and so far from allowing this first failure to dishearten me, I shall only set about the next with additional vigour and determination."

The stranger, upon hearing this, gave a peculiar smile, which, however, Tom was by far too busy to notice.

But doubtless the stranger was thinking of the time when he was as full of ardent aspirations as Tom was then.

Our friend now bent his way again to that point at which the stream entered the cavern.

"Is the current always as strong as it is now?"

"Very nearly. I fancy the volume of water has been greater lately."

"Have you ever tried to stand against it?"

"Yes."

"And failed?"

"Completely."

"Well, it is but the matter of another wetting," said Tom, calmly, "so I will try myself. Besides, perhaps you did not have such a thing as this to aid you."

As he spoke, Tom King caught hold of one end of the rope, which still remained tied round his waist in the manner we have described.

The stranger shook his head.

Tom untied the knot.

The rope was long and strong.

"The very thing," said Tom. "Now look here—I will show you how to try an experiment."

Some little distance above the centre of the arch was a sharp, jutting piece of rock—in shape more like a gigantic spike than aught else.

A slip knot having been tied in one end of the rope, Tom cast it over this projection and drew it tight.

Then grasping the other end securely, Tom stepped into the stream.

The violence of the current was, however, something of which he had no conception until then.

Before he was aware of it he had lost his footing.

In vain he struggled to regain it.

He kept fast his hold upon the rope, and well it was that he did so, or he would inevitably have been carried over the verge of the waterfall.

So great was the force of the water, that all attempts to make his feet touch the rocky bed were futile.

He was completely borne up upon the surface.

"Help me," he said, to the stranger—"pull me to the shore!"

The request was complied with in a moment.

"You seemed at first to think," remarked the stranger, "that I had made no thorough, resolute effort to release myself, but that was a mistake, for, as you see, your second attempt has succeeded no better than the first."

"Very true," said Tom, as he shook the water from his drenched garments. "I am now thoroughly convinced of the hopelessness of attempting to effect an egress in that direction, though I have no doubt that, could we but once get beneath the arch, we should then find that the violence of the current was much abated."

"But how to do it?"

"I don't believe it can be done."

"You have tried, then, what I believe to be the only means by which the cavern may be left."

"You forget the other arch."

"No, I do not, but I do not look upon that as another means, and I should think that to pass under it would be nothing in the world else but deliberate suicide."

"Why so?"

"Because it is opposed to all probability that the water-course can find an outlet anywhere above ground."

"And I consider you have very slight grounds for coming to such a conclusion."

"Then you think it likely that it flows out somewhere at the side of the mountain?"

"I do."

The stranger shook his head.

Tom now set about the removal of his rope from the projecting point of rock, which he found to be no easy matter.

In the end, however, he succeeded, and then sat down to rest himself and to think further of what he purposed doing.

There was no shrinking from his purpose, for Tom's nature was such as to cause him to prefer losing his life in an attempt to release himself from captivity to remaining for an indefinite time a prisoner.

And yet, for all that, he had no desire to throw his life away, and that is why he sat down to give the subject further consideration.

He wished to make a trial first of what he was about to do, and then, should it fail, for him to be able to make his way back into the cavern again and try some other scheme.

His reflections were of too busy a nature to allow him to remain long seated.

Starting up, he made his way to the second arch, and there remained for several moments as though vacantly gazing upon the water that was hurrying beneath it.

The stranger still continued, as before, to watch every movement and change of countenance with the utmost closeness.

Before Tom had been gazing long he came to the conclusion that the current here was by no means as violent as at the other arch—indeed, he believed he could successfully make a stand against it.

This was a point most important to be ascertained.

Tom was not the one to remain long in doubt in a case where the matter might so easily be solved, so he once again called the services of the rope into requisition.

Affixing it to a point of the rock and seizing hold tightly of one end, he committed himself to the water as before.

A cry of satisfaction announced that his anticipations were not ill founded.

By the aid of a slight amount of assistance from the rope, he was able to maintain his footing firmly.

This was a great deal accomplished, and encouraged him to proceed.

His next step was to pass cautiously under the arch—the water being about only up to his middle.

In this manner he proceeded as far as the rope would allow.

He was now in profound darkness, but he was greatly surprised to discover that the channel widened considerably, so that the water neither flowed so swiftly as before nor was it so deep.

"I wish the rope was a few yards longer," he muttered as he made a vain endeavour to pierce the deep obscurity. "But this is a great deal gained. I must now set to work and try what my ingenuity can invent."

Tom had not much trouble to get back again.

"What think you of our prospect now?" asked the stranger.

"I have every hope of success," was Tom's reply.

"But how?"

"The current, as I told you, is nothing like so strong as I imagined, and I believe it would be quite possible for us to follow the course of the passage so far as we thought proper, and then retrace our steps, should there be a necessity for doing so."

"But is it not a desperate chance?"

"No more desperate than we ought to try. Listen: The sides appear to be uniformly rough and jagged. Now I think that if we secure the ends of the rope round each other's waists, we might venture in safety, because you would take one side and I the other. Then, by clinging tightly we could advance, and have double the power over the force of the current."

"I don't think much of your plan," said the stranger, with great candour. "But perhaps you understand these matters much better than I do, and therefore I shall leave this to you."

"But do you consent to aid me?"

"I do; for I am so weary of my existence here that I would do anything that offered a chance of putting a period to it."

"Come, then," said Tom, "let us try now. The sooner we set about it the better."

The rope was now disengaged.

One end Tom secured tightly round his waist in such a way that the knot would neither slip nor come undone.

The stranger followed his example, and then, after repeating his instructions, Tom ventured to enter the water.

The stranger entered at the same moment.

Both took a tight grasp at the sides of the arch, and then prepared to advance.

"Cling tightly," said Tom; "and I will get as far as I can in advance. Then I will hold with all my might, and you can advance too."

"Go on," was the reply given, in tones of great determination.

Tom was very circumspect in all his actions, never releasing his hold upon one point of the rock until he had tightly grasped another.

But keeping thus to one side carried another advantage with it, for this was where the water rushed with great impetuosity.

The tightening of the rope warned Tom that he could proceed no further, so, grasping a jutting portion of rock with both arms, he called to his companion to follow him.

His injunction was immediately complied with.

All went well.

Each step taken thus safely served to fill the stranger with increased confidence and hope.

He, too, went on until the tightness of the cord prevented him from going further.

"Now," said Tom, "maintain a tight hold, so that, in case I may miss my grasp, you will be able to save me from drifting completely away."

"Right. Go on."

Tom obeyed unhesitatingly, and the progress they made soon served to show the stranger the excellence of the mode of operation.

It was a dreadful progress, though, and one that taxed the courage to the utmost.

In a very short time indeed they became totally involved in darkness.

When they turned a shuddering look back, the archway through which they had passed was scarcely discernible from the general gloom.

Before them not the faintest ray of light could be perceived to indicate that there was in front any opening by which they could achieve their much-wished-for escape.

The roaring of the water, too, added inexpressibly to the dismalness of their situation.

"Courage!" cried Tom, fancying his companion flagged a little—"courage! All is going well! This is much more than I ventured to anticipate."

But his voice was almost drowned by the deafening din of the tumbling water; and he was scarcely certain whether the full import of his words had been caught.

The stranger, however, struggled on.

But the water, which was of an icy coldness, had an awfully numbing effect upon their limbs.

Their fingers, too, were so much chilled that every moment the task of holding the rockwork became more and more difficult.

There was another circumstance, too, which shortly occurred, and which promised badly for them.

The passage narrowed, and, as a matter of course, the current increased in impetuosity.

The water also flew up in a kind of spray, which, falling on the rockwork, rendered it as slippery as glass.

The stranger felt his strength was failing him.

He wished to retrace his steps, believing that nothing lay before them but certain death.

He called out to Tom to that effect.

But his voice was drowned by the roaring of the water.

He called again and again.

Finding no notice taken, he waited till the rope tightened.

Then he tugged at it, in the hope of conveying to Tom his desire to retrace his steps.

But this action was performed at a most unfortunate moment.

Tom felt that he had not so good a grasp as usual, and endeavoured to better it.

This was the moment when the stranger gave the rope a sharp snatch.

Slight as it was, it proved too much for the strength of Tom's fingers.

His grasp slipped off the glass-like rock, and in the twinkling of an eye he found himself being carried with frightful rapidity along the watercourse.

His first act upon recovering his senses a little was to utter a loud shout of warning to his companion.

But long before this cry had escaped his lips the stranger had been dragged from his hold by the force with which Tom had been carried away.

After making several ineffectual efforts to arrest the rapidity of his progress, Tom abandoned the attempt, and directed all his energies towards the task of keeping himself from being violently dashed against the rugged sides.

On—he went, with a swiftness that made the preservation of his breath a matter of extreme difficulty.

On—on, each moment his speed becoming more and more terrific!

On—on, until by degrees all consciousness left him, save a small amount which still enabled him from time to time to make feeble efforts for his preservation.

How far he was thus carried along in this Egyptian darkness he was not, of course, able to form the least idea.

It must, however, have been a very great distance, for a long time elapsed, and the current carried him along with extreme velocity.

More than once his body was dashed with considerable violence against the rockwork, and this would serve to restore to him a portion of his senses just as he was about losing them altogether.

At last, with a sudden rush, he found himself carried out into the daylight.

How it was he could never recollect.

He must have been in a condition closely verging upon insensibility, for he never noticed the gradual change from darkness to light which must inevitably have taken place.

He was weak, bruised, and much exhausted.

Nevertheless, he managed to crawl to the sloping shore; but no sooner was he fairly out of reach of the water than his strength utterly left him and consciousness as well.

The next sensation he experienced was one of intense cold.

Opening his eyes, he found that the moon and stars were shining brightly in the undimmed sky above him.

By slow degrees, as he painfully raised himself up, the recollection of what had happened came clearly to his mind.

With a sudden start he looked round, hoping to catch sight of his companion.

But he was disappointed.

There was the rope still attached to his own waist, but by some means or other it had been parted in the middle—apparently by chafing against some point of rock.

Painfully and with difficulty Tom rose to his feet, for a most benumbing stiffness had taken possession of every joint.

At first he was so weak as scarcely to be able to maintain an erect posture.

Straining his eyes, he endeavoured to catch sight of the stranger.

But in vain.

All around was as silent as some forest never trodden by human feet.

The scene was picturesque and beautiful—especially so now that all harsh and rugged features were softened by the silvery effulgence of the moon.

On one side was a mass of rock of a kind and structure rarely met with in an English landscape.

It was from the base of this that the subterranean stream had issued, and Tom listlessly watched where it flowed calmly and gently through the smooth green meadows, affording no indication of its former turbulence.

"He is gone," said Tom King, at length, having satisfied himself that no trace of his late companion could be seen—"he is gone, but where I cannot guess. I must be moving, too. My veins are like ice, and nothing but rapid motion will get my blood once more into proper circulation. My horse, too, I have lost that. No matter, I have escaped the officers, and my loss is by no means irreparable. If all is well, I shall be able to make my way back to the inn easily by daybreak."

With these words Tom turned round, and, at first with slow, uncertain steps, made his way from the spot which had so nearly proved a fatal one for him.

CHAPTER MXLVIII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS A SINGULAR ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY, WHICH IS PRODUCTIVE OF STILL MORE SINGULAR RESULTS.

LEAVING the completion of Tom King's adventures on this night to be related at a more convenient opportunity, we will return once more to the yard at the back of the Jolly Tar Inn, where, as the reader will doubtless well remember, we left Maud and Dick Turpin, both mounted and in the act of setting out.

The prospect of a night of adventure and excitement caused Maud's cheeks to glow, her heart to flutter, and her breath to come and go quickly.

"Are you quite ready?" Dick asked.

"Quite."

"Come, then. Keep close by my side, and at all hazards obey implicitly every one of my injunctions."

"You may depend upon it," Maud answered, as she gave her horse the rein.

The prospect of sharing all danger with Dick, and of passing several hours in his company when she expected to be left in the dreadful solitude of the inn, enduring a thousand apprehensions, filled her mind with a joyfulness to which she had long been a stranger.

Dick noticed her good spirits, and guessing at the cause, could not help experiencing a very large amount of satisfaction.

"Oh," Maud exclaimed, with joyful accents, "what a delight is this! I feel it because of the contrast which it offers to a sojourn in that awful place."

"We will not remain there long," replied Dick, "though you ought to place due weight upon the security it offers."

"I do—I do. But, nevertheless, it does not abate its horror. When shall you commence your journey to Stonehenge?"

"It will not be long first."

"Do you not think, Dick, that if you were to try, you could between now and then make such arrangements as

would enable us all to leave England in company with Tom Davis?"

This was a question which, on many accounts, was a difficult one for Dick to answer.

Fortunately, chance intervened and saved him the trouble.

"Hark!" he cried, just as Maud was pronouncing the last word of her interrogation—"hark! I fancy I heard something then!"

Maud, dreading the approach of danger, listened with the utmost intently.

But all was still.

"What was it like?" she at length ventured to inquire.

"I fancied a horse's hoofs, but I must have been mistaken. Ha! here is the high-road. Now, then, it will be necessary to make use of the utmost caution."

Up to this moment they had been making their way across the open country, but now, as Dick had said, they had come to the high-road, which was only separated from them by a hedge so low that Maud felt sure her horse could easily leap across it.

Dick thought so too, and so jumped Black Bess over first for an example to the other.

In less than a second Maud was by his side.

So far, then, all was well.

"Do you intend keeping upon the highway to-night?" asked Maud, with some trepidation.

"I had not decided," was the reply, "but I think so, since my intention in coming out to-night is to meet with a good adventure if I can; and where am I so likely to succeed as upon the high-road?"

This was an unanswerable question, so Maud wisely remained silent.

Dick occupied the interval by listening keenly, for he could scarcely make himself believe that he had been deceived by some accidental sound.

Still he was unable to hear anything more.

"Come," he said; "we will ride on quietly, and trust to chance to place something in our way."

Maud's excitement increased, and it was no wonder that it should do so.

Suddenly Dick raised his arm and pointed in advance.

"What is that?" he asked. "It is something white."

"A gate, I think," answered Maud.

"Yes, to be sure—I see it now distinctly. It is a turn-pike."

"It is closed."

"Yes, you might expect it would be at this hour."

"Shall you venture to pass through?"

"I think so. I may be lucky enough to learn whether any officers are on the road to-night."

Maud offered no opposition.

Indeed, it would have been most unwise for her to have attempted to do so, since Dick must be allowed to be the best judge of what ought to be done in all cases.

A very few minutes enabled them to reach the toll-gate.

A dim light was shining from one of the windows in the tollman's little wooden dwelling.

"Gate—gate!" cried Dick, in a loud voice.

After a short delay the door was opened, and the toll-keeper made his appearance.

"Dang me!" he said. "I was just going to try to have a little bit of rest. I have been waiting here for more than an hour for some one to come to the gate."

"And has no one passed during all that time?"

"Not a blessed soul, sir."

"That's very singular, isn't it?"

"We used to think so, but now we are getting used to it."

"How so?"

"Why, the people are all in such a mortal fright about Dick Turpin and the rest of the highwaymen that they would rather do anything than travel after dark. I don't mind it much, for it gives us a little more peace."

"I suppose so," answered Dick. "And as we have disturbed you, take that for your trouble—I will call for the change some other day."

During the conversation just given, the gate had been unlocked and thrown open.

Dick slipped a guinea into the tollman's hand, who was far from expecting any such sum.

But it developed in him a very great deal of latent respect and civility.

He touched his hat several times.

Just as Dick was riding off, he said:

"Don't be afraid to ride back at full speed, captain," he cried, with a meaning intonation of his voice. "You will find the gate wide open."

"All right! Thanks! Good night!"

"He knew you!" ejaculated Maud.

"He guessed who I might be, perhaps. However, I shall look upon that guinea as being particularly well laid out."

"But should you trust to what he said?"

"Certainly! I have gained so much and lost so little by trusting to people that I shall continue to do so. If I distrusted I could do nothing."

"It is fortunate no officers are on the road."

"It is. And yet, if what he says is correct, I may have a good deal more trouble in looking for an adventure than I at all anticipated."

"It is getting very dark."

"Very," said Dick, glancing up at the sky. "We shall have some rain, perhaps a heavy storm, before long."

This was anything but a comfortable prospect.

There was little doubt about Turpin's words coming true.

Since their departure from the inn, immense masses of clouds had rose and thickly covered over the whole face of the firmament, causing the densest darkness to prevail.

The wind moaned and whistled, too, among the rustling tree-tops with that peculiar and unmistakable sound so often heard before a storm.

Every now and then Maud would shiver and draw her cloak more closely around her, for the air was in truth very keen.

Still, Dick journeyed on with a resolute air, as though he by no means intended that the elements should interfere with his night's sport.

"Hark!" he said again. "Surely I cannot be mistaken this time?"

"No," said Maud, "I can hear a horse approaching."

"Yes, and only one. Depend upon it, this will prove a lucky adventure, as we can make sure nothing but some urgent business would induce anyone to be abroad at such an hour as this."

The traveller came on at a steady rate, as though he had a long journey before him.

Dick came to a halt.

"Now, Maud," he said, "place yourself in the shadow of this hedge. There, that will do, and on no account must you move until I come back to you. If I feel sure you are here I shall retain my calmness. If you venture forth, it will so discompose me that my adversary will be able to take every advantage of it, and the worst may happen."

"I promise," said Maud, who was terrified to death at the thoughts which Dick's words had suggested—"I promise faithfully to remain immovable. Don't let that disturb you, but for my sake do—do be careful of your safety!"

"I will, depend upon it!" said Dick, who now rode slowly on towards the approaching traveller.

When he judged himself close enough, Dick increased his pace.

Unawares to his surprise, the traveller did so likewise, as though he was anxious to bring about a meeting as quickly as possible.

Dick was still more surprised at finding that this stranger, beyond all doubt, rode directly towards him, and manifestly in a most aggressive manner.

This was something altogether unaccountable and unprecedented.

But Dick's state of wonderment did not prevent him from holding on his course with his accustomed steadiness.

Another half-dozen paces brought himself and the stranger face to face.

"Stand," said Dick, in a resolute tone of voice—"stand! No trifling! Hand over what valuables you have about you!"

The stranger stopped at once.

But instead of seeming affected by the highwayman's demand, he burst into a loud, coarse-sounding laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you're not on the toby lay, are you? That's a joke now! I was just going to cry 'Stand and deliver!' to you, for I was fairly out of patience with waiting. I have positively been riding up and down here for the last two hours without catching sight of anyone but yourself; and as for money, I only wish I had a trifle about me; if I had, you would not see me here in the cold."

"But—but," ejaculated Dick, who was considerably taken aback by this address, "you don't mean to say you are a highwayman?"

"Nothing more nor less," responded the man, with another laugh. "What do you say—shall we join together, and try whether fortune will favour us?"

"No, no," answered Dick, somewhat hastily—"you go your way and I will go mine."

"As you like," was the reply, given with another laugh. "Good night! and I hope you will have better luck than I have met with at present."

"Good night!" said Dick, who was more annoyed at this encounter than he liked to admit even to himself.

The highwayman rode on somewhat smartly in the direction of the toll-gate.

Dick repaired to the spot where he had left Maud.

He found her trembling slightly and full of anxiety to know the result of the adventure.

"Why—confound the fellow!—he had the impudence to tell me he was a highwayman."

"A highwayman?" ejaculated Maud.

"Yes; and what is more, he declared he was about to cry 'Stand!' when I forestalled him."

Maud could not help smiling.

"What a harsh, disagreeable laugh he had!"

"Very. But come on, we will venture to try fortune a little further."

"Did you feel that?"

"What?"

"That drop of rain."

"No; but now I do, though."

Dick Turpin might well say this.

The first drop which Maud had felt seemed to be the immediate precursor of a thousand others, for such a violent descent of rain now ensued that was altogether unparalleled in Dick's experience.

In less than a moment they were both nearly drenched to the skin.

"Confound it!" Turpin said. "Nothing but misfortune! What could be more unfortunate than this? You should have stayed at the inn, Maud, and then you would have been spared this wetting."

"But I should have been separated from you, and that, in my thinking, overbalances every other consideration."

Dick could not be displeased at this speech.

But he was determined that Maud should suffer no more from her devotion to him than he could possibly help.

By the aspect of the elements, he could tell that the rain would continue to fall for a considerable length of time.

Consequently, he began to look about him for a shelter of some kind, to which they could betake themselves until the violence of the rain had to some extent abated.

He had not been looking long before he caught sight of a light glimmering at some distance in advance.

Nothing could have been more welcome to his eyes than this.

He accelerated his speed instantly.

"Come, Maud," he cried, "we will try to get under cover for a few moments at any rate."

Upon drawing nearer, he discovered that the light proceeded from one of the windows in a comfortable-looking old roadside inn.

Upon seeing this, he paused for half a moment, for he was doubtful whether it would be altogether safe or expedient to attempt to gain an entrance here.

But he had the word not only of the tollman, but of the highwayman as well, that there had been no one whatever on the road for a considerable length of time.

It was consequently rather unlikely that he would be recognised by the people keeping the inn, for, to the best of his belief, Dick had never been in this part of the country before.

This consideration induced him to run the risk of taking shelter for a time.

The clatter of their horses' feet, as they drew up beside the long wooden horse-trough, quickly brought the landlord and ostler to the door.

"A roughish night, sir," said the former, saluting Dick—"but just such weather as I expected we should have."

"We will stay here awhile," said Dick, "if you can accommodate myself and my wife with a private room."

"Certainly—certainly!" was the brisk reply. "Step this way, if you please."

Dick was on the ground in a moment, and assisted Maud to alight with a rapidity that astonished the two lookers-on.

"Leastways, sir," continued the landlord, as he ushered his guests across the threshold, "it's not exactly a private room, but I have no doubt it will answer your purpose quite as well, if you do not think of making a long stay."

"Let us see it."

"Yes, yes—certainly! Be good enough to follow me. This way, if you please."

With an abundance of obsequiousness, the landlord conducted our two friends along the passage of the inn and into a room in which a bright fire was burning cheerfully, and which most certainly was not a private one, inasmuch as several persons were sitting in it, engaged in the agreeable occupations of smoking, drinking, talking, and warming themselves at the fire.

The landlord crossed this apartment, and opened an inner door leading out of it.

Dick and Maud followed him as closely and as quickly as possible, in order to escape the curious regards which were bent upon them.

The chamber into which the landlord conducted them could not be called otherwise than a very comfortable one.

There was a fire burning, a lamp was lighted, and a general air of that comfort and cleanliness for which, as a rule, country English inns are so celebrated, pervaded everything.

"This will do, sir, I suppose?" said the landlord.

"Oh yes, very well! I will just follow you out to the back, to see where the horses are put—"

"Oh, sir, there is no occasion for your taking that much trouble, I assure you! I will make a point of attending to them myself."

"Thanks!" persisted Dick; "but there are some little matters in the holsters of which I stand in need, and these I should much prefer fetching myself."

"Oh, by all means! You can follow me this way—there is no occasion to go through the front room."

The landlord now opened another door, which Dick had not yet had time to perceive.

It communicated with the back part of the premises.

Dick was very glad to see it, for it seemed to promise him an avenue for speedy escape in case circumstances should arise to render flight necessary.

"I shall not be a moment, Maud," he said, with a peculiar smile. "Remain here till I return."

With these words upon his lips, he followed the landlord into a kind of kitchen, by means of a door in which they gained access to the yard.

The stables were close at hand.

Dick had only made an idle excuse when he mentioned the holsters, but still it sufficed to furnish a plausible reason for wishing to pay a personal visit to his horses in the stable.

When he entered, the ostler was engaged in removing the trappings.

"Stay!" cried Dick—"it is not worth while to do that, for I shall only stay here a very short time. Just loosen the girths and take the bits out of their mouths—you need not trouble yourself to do anything more."

The man at once desisted, and proceeded to fetch the corn, a greater quantity of which was put into the manger than probably there would have been had Dick not been present.

Dick fumbled at the holsters, and then said:

"Give them both a good rub down, my man, and have them ready at the time I want you. I sha'n't forget you."

"All right, sir."

So saying, Turpin hastily ran after the landlord into the house, for the rain seemed to be coming down faster than ever.

"Bring a bottle of wine," he said.

"Very good, sir—a drop of the best?"

"Yes, the very best your cellar can afford—the price will not be out of my reach."

The landlord made a more obsequious bow than usual, while he wished that such customers as Dick were only a little more common.

Maud was glad to see Dick return.

"It is rather ridiculous," she whispered, "to call this a private room."

"Why so?"

"Because don't you see that formerly this and the next both formed one room, and now they have been divided by a very thin wooden partition, which does not reach to the ceiling. We are private so far as being free from being seen, but every syllable can be overheard."

"No matter," said Dick, though he was not very well pleased, nevertheless. "We shall not be here long, so it is not worth while to make any fuss about it."

They were interrupted at this moment by the entrance of the landlord carrying the bottle of wine.

"There," he said; "when you taste that you will say it is not such wine as ordinarily falls to a traveller's share. In fact," he added, in a confidential whisper, "I bought it for my own drinking."

Dick fancied Maud looked somewhat pale and languid, so he said:

"Have you anything at hand tempting to the appetite?"

"As luck will have it, I have; for you must know, sir, that a sale will be held here to-morrow, and a cold dinner is to be provided. We are cooking the things now, and I feel pretty certain there are some beautiful bottled chickens just ready to take out of the pot."

"The very thing!" cried Dick. "Be quick, and bring one here!"

The landlord vanished.

Maud smiled, and murmured:

"It is very kind of you, Dick, to be so thoughtful."

"Tut, tut—nonsense! But what a nuisance that noise is."

The noise to which Dick referred proceeded from the adjoining room, and was caused by the persons who were sitting there talking all together in a loud voice.

But Dick soon saw this was an advantage, for it prevented any conversation between Maud and himself from being overheard.

"We ought to think ourselves most fortunate in falling into such comfortable quarters. I assure you it is far more than I ventured to expect."

Just as he spoke, the landlord again entered, carrying before him on a tray about as tempting and appetising a meal as could well be placed before any hungry travellers.

There was a beautiful boiled chicken, with some white home-made bread and other necessary ecoteras.

"There!" the landlord cried—"though I say it, that is a meal for an emperor. Is there anything else you require?"

"Nothing, I think."

"If there is, just pull that bell-wire, and I will be with you in a moment."

So saying, to the relief of both our friends, he quitted the room.

Maud and Dick both laid aside as much of their apparel as they could, and hung it on some chairs in front of the blazing fire.

Then they both sat down to discuss the meal.

Ere they had partaken of more than three or four mouthfuls each, both heard a sound which caused them to stop simultaneously in what they were about.

That sound was the tramping of a horse's feet.

Nearer and nearer came the sound.

"Who is that?" asked Maud.

"Hush—hush!"

Just as Dick pronounced these two words, the clattering of the horse's hoofs abruptly ceased.

It was evident that some one had pulled up with great haste and suddenness in front of the inn.

CHAPTER MXLIX.

CONTAINS THE SEQUEL TO DICK TURPIN'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

MAUD started to her feet, with alarm visibly depicted upon every feature of her face.

"Hush—hush!" said Dick again. "Be still—oh, be still!"

"But who is it?"

"That I cannot tell—perhaps nothing that concerns us. At any rate, let us remain here where we are until we hear something further."

The people in the adjoining room had evidently heard the fresh arrival, for they became hushed and silent, listening in expectation of learning who it was.

The murmuring of voices was heard without.

Then a door was thrown open, and a heavy footstep sounded in the passage.

This footstep came nearer and nearer to the door of the room in which the company was sitting.

Upon the threshold he paused, and after fumbling a moment with the latch, flung the door open.

His appearance was greeted with a universal cry.

"Hullo, Craddock!" said two or three at once. "What ever brings you back here again? We thought you had gone for good."

The reply was a laugh.

That laugh made Turpin start.

He had heard it before.

There could be no mistaking the loud, coarse tones. It was a laugh which, once heard, could be always remembered.

Dick was in no sort of doubt whatever as to the identity of the new-comer.

It was the man he had stopped so short a time before upon the road, and who had declared himself to be a highwayman.

It struck Turpin as being very strange, though, that he should be so well known by the inn guests.

He waited somewhat impatiently to hear more, in the hope of having all his speculations set at rest.

"You are surprised," cried the new-comer, laughing again; "but I am not, I assure you. I wish I had taken old Boniface's advice; I should then have escaped this drenching. But, then, you know a landlord never wants to lose sight of a good customer. He told me it would rain, and, my eyes and limbs, don't it!"

"So it made you turn back?"

"It did, and I account myself a wise man for having done so. Why, except the toll-gate, there is not a dwelling to be met with for the next fourteen miles."

"You did right," said the landlord, joining in the conversation. "If you had gone on you might have met with highwaymen, and so lost all you have about you, and you know well it is no trifling amount."

"Highwaymen?" said the new-comer, in a voice expressive of the utmost contempt and scorn. "Why, I don't care a tinker's d—n for a whole regiment of them! I have never been robbed yet, and never shall, I dare be sworn! Let us come to the fire."

There was the peculiar sound made by moving chairs quickly across a bricked floor, and then it would seem that the wet traveller got close to the fire to dry his clothes.

"Ah, Mr. Craddock!" said the landlord, in a serious voice, "it's all very well to talk like you do, and let me tell you that you are by no means the first I have heard make such remarks; but, recollect, they everyone came to grief in the end, and so will you some fine day or other, despite your boldness."

"Have your own way," replied Mr. Craddock, for so we may as well henceforth designate him, since it would appear that this was his name. Every man knows his own know best. But I tell you again, I hope I may live till I am robbed, and then I shall be assured of a good long life."

The confidence with which these words were pronounced is indescribable.

Dick listened with all his ears.

All that he had heard since the stranger's arrival had been in the highest degree enigmatical.



[DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON MR. CRADDOCK.]

Being so deeply interested in the whole matter as he was, the impatience with which he waited to listen to the rest may possibly be imagined.

He felt certain that he had yet something of importance to learn.

"We shall see," was the answer made by the landlord to Mr. Craddock's last speech.

"So we shall. Just hark how the rain comes down!"

"But how is it," inquired some one, "that you consider yourself so free from what almost everyone else is so liable to?"

"Ah, that is a secret!"

"And one worth knowing."

"I should think so."

The last words were accompanied by one of the speaker's boisterous laughs.

"But surely you will not be so unjust and so unchristian-like as to keep it to yourself?"

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"Indeed, but I shall though!"

"Then, there, I think, you are wrong. You ought to allow your friends to participate in it at least."

"But were you ever stopped, Mr. Craddock?" inquired another of the company.

"You mean by a highwayman?"

"Yes."

"Then I have."

"Many times?"

"Yes."

"When was the last?"

"To-night."

"To-night?" echoed the interrogator, amid a general expression of the utmost surprise.

Mr. Craddock laughed again.

Dick thought more boisterously than ever.

"You need not look so incredulous," he continued. "I can assure you it is neither more nor less than the truth."

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"But pray let us hear more about it. You have now inflamed our curiosity to the very utmost. Do you really mean to say that you have been stopped to-night by a highwayman, and that you have brought back all your money?"

"I have. Here it is. Hark!"

Mr. Craddock slapped his pocket as he spoke.

"We are amazed! Did you shoot the fellow?"

"No. We parted in quite a peaceable and friendly manner."

There could be no doubt that Mr. Craddock was amusing himself in no inconsiderable degree at the expense of the company assembled.

There was a brief silence after this, and Mr. Craddock was the first to break it.

"Landlord, you shall bring me a bottle of that rousing old port of yours. I'll be—d if the rain has not chilled me to the very bone!"

"Then let me tell you, Mr. C., that you could not have anything better than my port in such a case," replied the landlord as he left the room to execute the pleasant commission.

All the guests were now literally devoured with curiosity to hear some details of that highway adventure which Mr. Craddock treated with such extraordinary coolness.

Dick Turpin having by this time quite satisfied himself that he had no particular danger to apprehend, sat down to his meal again and motioned to Maud to follow his example, which she did very willingly.

But no words were exchanged, because of the probability that Mr. Craddock would overhear Dick, and would then most likely recognize his voice.

The wine was presently brought; and from the sounds which reached his ears, Dick concluded that Mr. Craddock had sat down near the fire to enjoy it.

"Shall you stay here all night now, sir?" the landlord inquired.

"Not unless the rain compels me to do so. It comes down now as fast as ever, doesn't it?"

"Faster, if possible."

"Ah, well! If it leaves off I shall depart, for my business is important, and I ought to be some miles farther on my road than I am. Gentlemen all, I drink to your good healths!"

The jingling of glasses followed.

"Come, Craddock, old boy," said some one, who to the best of Dick's recollection had not yet spoken, "don't be so unreasonable as to keep this matter to yourself. Tell us, and if you like we will undertake to say that it shall go no further."

"Yes—yes!" cried several voices in response.

"I suppose I shall know no peace if I do not satisfy you, and yet I am afraid I shall be parting with a very valuable secret without any recompense; perhaps I may live to repent it."

"No—no," said all those present who over and over again asseverated that whatever he said should be treated with the utmost confidence.

Of course they imagined themselves quite alone, for the excitement under which they laboured made them altogether forget the presence of the two travellers they had seen enter the adjoining chamber.

"You promise well," said Mr. Craddock, at length, "and if the secret goes no further, it will not matter."

"We assure you it shall not."

"So you said—so you said. But you must please to understand that there is something more in store for you than the mere gratification of your curiosity, for the revelation I am about to make will enable you to defy the power of all highwaymen just in the same way that I do."

This announcement of course had the effect of making them all, if possible, more ardently desirous to hear the disclosure.

"I have heard," began Mr. Craddock, "that a very wise man once remarked that the cleverest and most successful schemes are the simplest; and if this observation holds as good in every case as it does in this, it is true indeed."

This preliminary speech was listened to with sundry manifestations of impatience.

"My scheme is certainly the simplest of the simplest," he went on, "and it will be best explained by relating to you what took place just after I left the inn here this

evening. I never make any alteration; and you may, if you choose, adopt the plan with as much ease and with the same good result as myself."

"We are all attention."

"I know that," responded Mr. Craddock, with another of his hoarse laughs; "and what is more, you are burning to hear the next words I have to say."

"Well, we confess it; and now keep us in a state of anxiety no longer."

"I will not. Well, when I set out from here I had not got far before I heard a horse approaching. 'Hullo,' I says to myself, 'I wonder who's coming!'"

"Well, I went along very quietly, for I more than half expected what this horseman was, as few people would be out on such a night unless compelled by necessity, or unless to rob some one else."

"In a short time I saw a man."

"He was riding slowly towards me, and by his very manner (for I have had some experience in these matters, let me tell you) I could tell this was a highwayman, and that he intended to call upon me to stand and deliver."

"Such being the case I resolved to adopt my never-failing plan, so I quickened my horse's pace and continued to ride direct towards him."

"When I got a little nearer, this fellow called out to me to stop, speaking in what he thought was doubtless a very intimidating tone of voice, but which made no impression at all upon me."

"On the contrary, as soon as he had finished speaking, I began to laugh as though I was heartily enjoying some capital joke."

"This considerably puzzled the highwayman, as it has done every one of the order upon whom I have tried the experiment."

"'Why,' I exclaimed, 'do you really mean it? Why, I was just going to make the same demand of you.'"

"You said that to the highwayman?"

"I did, for my plan in these cases is nothing more than to pretend to be a highwayman myself. That does the business capitally."

"Well, and what happened next?"

"Why, he stared in astonishment, so I went on to tell him that I had been riding up and down the road looking for prey until I was out of all patience, and that I had been congratulating myself upon hearing somebody at last."

"And did he believe you?"

"He did."

"Well, we will take your word for it, but—"

"But what?"

"Why, we should scarcely have thought that a highwayman could have been so easily imposed upon."

"Ah, that's it! It is the very simplicity of the thing that does it. It is that alone to which it owes its success, though I do begin to believe that these highwaymen fellows are no better than fools."

"It would seem so, however, by your showing. I could scarcely have thought it."

"Nevertheless, I assure you it is a fact."

"And did he ride away then?"

"Yes, shortly after. I told him I was quite out of luck and not blessed with a single coin of the realm, and so I proposed that we should go partners with each other for the rest of the night."

"You—you had the impudence to say that?"

"I had."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, declined, of course; I knew very well that he would, which was the reason why I asked him. Ha, ha!"

"But suppose—?"

"Suppose what?" asked Mr. Craddock, somewhat sharply.

"That he had agreed?"

"What, to join with me?"

"Yes."

"There was no fear of such a thing; but still, if he had, I should have trusted to my ingenuity to frame some excuse."

"It seems to me," said another voice, "that the plan is a very excellent one, and I shall not fail to adopt it if ever I have occasion, which I sincerely hope I shall not."

"It is no pleasant matter, I can assure you," remarked Mr. Craddock, "and by no means easy to preserve such a

bold front as will deceive your adversary—in a word, you must play your part well."

"Of course," said the voice which had just before spoken. "It cannot be said that I shall fail for want of knowing the way these affairs are managed, for I have been robbed thrice."

"Do you mean to say you surrendered your property on every occasion?"

"I did, for there was always a pistol before me, and I reasoned thus: This wealth I am about to lose I can replace again; but if I lose my life, there will be no recovering that again."

"You speak like a philosopher," said Mr. Craddock, with a sneer.

"Do I? Well, my philosophy will not prevent me from adopting your stratagem, especially if I should be assailed upon this journey, for I have over three hundred pounds with me."

"And that would prove a serious loss."

"It would, in the present state of trade. However, my old friend Tompkins is going to ride with me, so we shall be able to personate highwaymen capitally."

"Perhaps Mr. Craddock would not mind accompanying us," said Tompkins; "we are going this road, you know."

"What time shall you start?"

"Not till after breakfast in the morning."

"Then you will have daylight, and consequently nothing to fear from highwaymen, for they are like owls—never seen by daylight. As for me, my business is too urgent to allow me to remain. I must be jogging on as soon as ever the weather will permit."

Bearing in mind that Dick Turpin heard the whole of the foregoing conversation, the reader may possibly be able to form some conception at the amount of annoyance he experienced.

To think that he, above all others, should have been tricked—deluded by so shallow a device.

He frowned and bit his lip, and every now and then, upon the utterance of some more than usually aggravating remark, he would start, and seem almost about to spring to his feet.

Maud could not help feeling some amusement at the chagrin which he displayed.

Certainly, it was enough to anger him in no ordinary degree.

But as he listened on, his face gradually assumed a very different expression.

Maud noticed it, and knew very well what it meant, for in a general way Turpin's countenance was as easily read by her as a book.

The expression boded no good to Mr. Craddock.

Indeed, before that very hilarious gentleman had brought his narrative to a conclusion, Dick had resolved upon what he should do.

His determination was that Mr. Craddock should no longer make a boast of his immunity from highway robbery.

Having thus, as we have said, decided upon his course of action, Dick became calmer, and even drank his wine with an air of complacent satisfaction.

What he had determined upon will appear in due course.

In the meanwhile he remained comfortable enough by the side of the roaring fire, complacently awaiting the pseudo highwayman's departure.

On the whole, while felicitating himself upon the manner in which he was about to avenge himself, Dick was not disposed to find much fault with the turn events had taken.

Quite unexpectedly, both Maud and himself had got into warm and comfortable quarters, for which both were grateful, and Maud especially.

It was getting very late before the rain showed any signs of abatement.

So great had been the downpour of rain that Dick heartily congratulated himself upon having escaped exposure to it.

"It's left off raining, I think," said Mr. Craddock, at length.

He rose from his seat as he made the observation, and going to the window, looked out.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "it's fine enough now. Let me have my horse, landlord, as soon as ever you can."

"I should advise and recommend you to stay till morning."

"No, no—I cannot afford the time."

"Well, have your own way. Your horse will be ready immediately."

With these words, the landlord quitted the room.

Maud now looked up, expecting that Dick would make some movement.

But she was disappointed, for he remained perfectly still.

After a brief delay, the horse was brought round to the front of the inn.

As soon as ever Mr. Craddock caught sight of it, he exclaimed:

"Good night, friends—or good morning, whichever you like to call it! Here's hoping you'll meet with a prosperous journey, and don't forget the secret. Above all, don't let the highwaymen guess what's o'clock, or the game will be spoilt for ever."

"Never fear—never fear!"

Mr. Craddock drained his glass and departed.

No sooner had he fairly left the premises than Dick rose quickly yet noiselessly, and motioned to Maud to be in readiness to follow him.

He then crossed the room to the door through which he had passed in company with the landlord on the occasion of his paying a visit to the stables.

This last-mentioned place was, of course, Dick's present destination.

He passed out unquestioned into the yard in company with Maud.

Ere they could gain the stable door, however, they perceived the landlord and the ostler coming towards them.

"Oh, sir," said the former, "I trust you have not wanted anything, and that you have not thought me neglectful!"

"Not at all—not at all!" responded Dick, heartily. "But as we only dropped in here for shelter, I am anxious, now that the rain is over, to be getting on the road again."

"Very good, sir! I am only anxious to know whether you are satisfied?"

"Very much so," answered Dick, with an air of great gusto. "And you may depend I shall not fail to recommend your inn to all my friends and acquaintances."

"I am much obliged to you, sir!"

In the meanwhile, the ostler had gone into the stable and brought forth the two horses.

Owing to the instructions which Dick had given, there was no time lost in preparing them for the road—the only thing requisite being to tighten a few buckles.

Nor did it take Dick very long to settle with the landlord, and, judging by that individual's appearance, it would seem that this had been done in a highly satisfactory manner.

Dick was indeed in a great hurry to be off, so without loss of time he assisted Maud to mount, and then sprang into the saddle himself.

He had a crown-piece ready to slip into the ostler's extended palm, and then he immediately set his steed in motion.

Maud followed him.

Upon reaching the high-road, Dick turned at once in the direction of the toll-gate, for, as the reader must already have surmised, it was his intention to pursue that highly-ingenuous gentleman, Mr. Craddock.

He was careful not to ride over fast from the inn, lest by so doing suspicion should be excited.

No sooner had the first bend in the road been turned than he cried:

"Now, Maud, let us see what your horse can do! Forward—forward! The faster the better!"

There was no fear of Black Bess being left behind, so Maud urged her horse to the utmost.

It was really an animal of very good quality, and having just been rested and fed, it was in capital condition for speed.

Away, then, they flew along the level surface of the hard high-road, at a pace that made the hedgerows and trees literally seem to fly past them, and which made the rich colour mantle in the cheeks of both.

It was very unlikely that Mr. Craddock had made any such speed as this, so, after having proceeded some dis-

land, Dick began to look about him, being under the impression that he ought by this time to be in sight.

It was by no means so dark as it had been, for the heavy downpour of rain had materially cleared the atmosphere, and already in the eastern sky there could be perceived some indications of the dawning of another day.

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN HAS HIS REVENGE UPON MR. CRADDOCK.

It was not until Dick Turpin paused upon the brow of a somewhat steep hill, and looked steadily before him, that he caught a glimpse of the individual of whom he was in pursuit.

Mr. Craddock was riding along at a very much swifter rate than when Dick had encountered him some hours previously.

Perhaps he was anxious to make up for the delay.

At any rate, there he was, and Dick felt that it was necessary for him to be prompt in his actions.

"Now, Maud," he said, speaking somewhat hurriedly, "you see that gentleman yonder? Well, I am going to overtake him and serve him out for deceiving me in the way he did; and what I want you to do in the meantime is to ride quietly after me so as not to be in danger. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"And yet do not press too closely after me as, if I should suddenly become aware that you were threatened with peril, the discovery would have the effect of paralysing my arm at the moment when it would be of the most service to me."

"Fear nothing on my account," was Maud's answer.

"If you act in accordance with my directions, all will be well."

Having settled this point, Dick gave Black Bess the rein.

Away she flew down the hill with a long, light, stretching gallop, like that of the greyhound.

Fast as Mr. Craddock was going, it must infallibly happen that he would be overtaken in the space of a few minutes.

Dick now, indeed, expected every moment to catch sight of him again, and presently, after passing round a somewhat sharp turn, he did so.

Mr. Craddock of course could not fail to hear that some one was powdering after him at a tremendous rate.

But the confidence he felt in his very clever plan, and the bold assurance that formed so strong and considerable an ingredient in his disposition, prevented him from feeling any uneasiness on this account.

He did just glance behind him to see who it was, but he did not increase his pace in the slightest degree.

"Hold!" cried Dick, in that loud, commanding tone which he could when he chose assume. "Pull up, I say, unless you wish to be brought to by a bullet!"

These words reached Mr. Craddock's ears and made him feel just a little uncomfortable, but without his knowing exactly why.

However, with an assumption of a great deal of surprise, he drew rein and wheeled about.

He recognised Turpin at once.

"Hullo!" he said. "Do we meet again? I hope you have had better luck than I have."

"Then you have your hope gratified," answered Dick, "for I assure you I have been very fortunate indeed."

"Have you really? Well, it's more than I have. The road this way has been quite deserted."

"Has it? Excuse me!"

Dick, as he spoke, placed himself in very close proximity indeed to Mr. Craddock.

"Hullo, sir! What do you mean?"

This exclamation was called forth by the sight of a pistol which Dick very calmly levelled at him.

"Stop—stop!" he continued, shrinking back, for he thought he could see quite down the barrel of the deadly weapon, and even catch sight of the bullet it contained—"stop, I say! What the deuce are you about?"

"You see this pistol?"

"Yes—rather plainer than I care about. May turn the muzzle of it another way."

"Nothing of the kind!"

"But I say you must, sir!"

"I decline!"

"Do you know who you are talking to?"

"Perfectly well. And I beg to assure you, in the first place, that when I say a thing I am invariably as good as my word."

"As bad, you mean!" said Mr. Craddock, endeavouring to get up another of his loud laughs; but the attempt was a perfect failure.

"As good or as bad—just whichever you like," continued Dick, imperturbably. "It comes to the same thing; and understand, that unless you quietly surrender to me all the money and valuables you have about you, this bullet shall find out whether you skull contains any brains or not."

"Take my word for it that it does. Don't attempt to discover it by any such means, I beg. But what do you want? What is the meaning of all this?"

"Simply that I require you to deliver over to me all the money you may at the present time be carrying with you."

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Craddock, "is this the way you observe honour among thieves?"

"Silence!" cried Dick—"no nonsense!"

"No, but surely dog would not rob dog. No, no—you don't understand, I feel sure. Would you without scruple deprive a fellow comrade of his spoil?"

"Certainly I would."

"Then you are a base villain!"

"I am content to be anything you like to call me," answered Dick, "provided I get your money."

"But this is monstrous. For one highwayman to attack and rob a comrade is a thing unheard of."

"No more nonsense!" cried Dick, with greater sternness than he had as yet displayed. "I have certain knowledge of two things."

"May I ask what they are?"

"Yes. In the first place, that you carry with you a considerable sum of money."

Mr. Craddock was silent.

"And the second is, that your highwaymanship is neither more nor less than an impudent assumption—one which, though it may have served you hitherto, will assuredly fail you for the future."

Upon thus finding that his long-maintained cheat was discovered, Mr. Craddock shook a little in the saddle, and turned a trifle paler than he was before.

"I shall stand no nonsense!" Dick added. "You imposed upon me once, and I am determined not to be satisfied with anything but the whole of the property of a valuable character that you have about you; so if you wish to escape any disagreeable consequences, you will hand over the whole quietly, without making any more fuss."

There was no possibility of thinking that Dick was not in earnest in what he said.

Mr. Craddock, in spite of the large amount of assurance which he possessed, felt in his heart that Dick fully meant every word he said.

But for all that, he was most reluctant to part with any of his property.

This was not solely on account of the value of it, but because of the dread he had of the ridicule that would in future be poured upon him.

Still, what was he to do?

To oppose himself in single combat with the highwayman was what he never once dreamt of.

He was by far too prudent to risk his life upon such a desperate chance.

He looked around him as though for relief.

Unable to see anyone, however, or even to hear a sound indicative of the approach of assistance, he, with a heavy sigh, thrust his hand into his pocket.

He produced a purse containing only a few guineas.

This, with manifest reluctance, he placed in the highwayman's hands.

"I want more than this!" cried Dick. "Tell no lies about what you have. I may as well inform you that I overheard every word that passed between you and the people at the inn just down the road, for I happened to be in the adjoining room at the time."

Upon hearing this avowal, Mr. Craddock gnashed his teeth with rage, because he saw that his own mouth had betrayed him.

If he had resisted the importunities of his friends, and kept the secret to himself, this humiliation would never have taken place.

"Come," said Dick, "my patience is exhausted. Just let me know whether you intend handing over the money yourself, or whether you prefer that I should take it from you by main force. Let me tell you that I am determined to have it by one means or other, so make your choice."

Once more Mr. Craddock's hand wandered to his pocket.

Once more he drew something forth.

This time it was something more worthy of Dick's acceptance, for it consisted of a very large bag of bank notes and gold, with which valuable contents it was crammed to repletion.

"Now the rest," said Dick—"I am resolved to have everything. And you ought always after this to esteem yourself a very lucky man for having got off so easily."

Mr. Craddock groaned.

Another bag was produced and surrendered.

His watch, rings, and indeed everything he had about him that was at all of a valuable character, followed.

"Now," said Dick, "you are at liberty to ride on. Be off with you, and the quieter you keep this little adventure the less you will be laughed at."

Mr. Craddock seemed glad enough to receive this intimation that he was at liberty to depart.

He at once struck his horse's flank with his heel and rode off.

Ere he had gone many paces, however, he wheeled round suddenly and raised his arm.

Rapid as the movement was, Dick saw it, and was as rapid in his own motions.

At the first glance Dick saw that Mr. Craddock held something in his hand, and intuitively guessed not only what it was, but what he intended to do.

He shifted his position with great suddenness.

At the selfsame moment there was a vivid flash and then a loud report.

But Dick, owing to the rapidity of his movements, escaped all injury.

A fierce feeling, however, instantly arose in his breast, for there was nothing which Dick so much detested as treachery, and nothing which filled him with so much resentment.

Without pausing to think, he started off in full pursuit.

Mr. Craddock saw him coming.

He had the mortification of finding that his shot had been wholly unavailing, and that the highwayman would not be satisfied until he had had his vengeance upon him.

Frantic with fear, he whipped and spurred his horse into a most furious gallop.

Black Bess put forth her extraordinary powers of speed, and consequently Dick Turpin soon found himself near enough to make his voice heard.

"Pull up!" he cried—"pull up, as you value your life! I owe you a shot, and if you disobey me I shall requite the obligation. Pull up, I say! My aim will be a better one than yours!"

But Mr. Craddock was in too great a state of terror to pay any attention to these cries.

If anything, he urged his horse to still greater exertion.

Dick's anger now was by no means so furious as it had been. Still, he was determined to have his revenge.

His pistol was raised, and now, taking a careful aim, he fired at the flying horse and rider.

The reader, however, must by this time know Dick too well to think that he was capable of so base an act as that of shooting a man down in cold blood.

His aim was correctly taken, and the bullet did its work, but it was at the horse he fired, and not at Mr. Craddock himself.

The effects of the shot, however, were not at the moment perceptible.

Very soon, however, the desperately wounded animal began to swerve and stagger, until finally, with a dull, heavy crash, it fell headlong to the earth.

Previous to the occurrence of this catastrophe, however, Mr. Craddock had surmised what was amiss, but he

was unable to think of anything else but retaining his seat as long as possible.

When the horse fell, of course he was not taken at all, and consequently escaped without any serious injury.

But before he could recover his breath sufficiently to make the attempt to rise, Dick was upon him.

"Now, rascal," he cried, in a savage voice, "what reason can you offer to prevent me at once taking away your miserable life as a punishment for your treacherous act? I look upon you as a murderer—you are one in intent, and it was through no fault of yours that you failed to be one in reality."

His words put Mr. Craddock into a still more dreadful state of fright.

He fully believed that his last hour upon the earth had come, and therefore he began to utter prayers with extraordinary volubility.

"Rise!" cried Dick, with more fury than ever in his tones—"rise, I say! Disobey me at your peril!"

Shaking in every limb, Mr. Craddock slowly and with much difficulty raised himself to his feet.

"You deserve nothing but death," said Turpin, "but yet I do not intend to cheat the hangman; but you shall pay dearly for that treacherous shot!"

While speaking these words, Dick produced from his pocket a piece of thin but particularly strong cord.

Mr. Craddock eyed it with great misgiving.

His apprehensions increased when he saw Turpin deliberately set to work and make a running noose in the end of it.

He thought this surely must be intended for his neck, but he soon found that Turpin had quite another use for it.

Before he quite knew what was intended, he found the cord tightly encircling his right wrist.

"Now," said Turpin, "this way, and if you are a wise man you will not think of offering the least resistance."

Dick gave the rope a sharp tug as he spoke, causing it to cut rather deeply into the flesh.

"Murder!"

"Silence, will you! This way, I say!"

Mr. Craddock obeyed promptly.

Dick merely conducted him to the trunk of a large elm tree that grew by the roadside.

Round this our old friend rapidly passed the cord, and with remarkable dexterity secured the other end to his captive's left wrist.

Mr. Craddock was now compelled to clasp the tree in a very close embrace—much closer than was at all agreeable, for Dick drew the rope as tightly as ever his strength would allow him, totally disregarding the while the horrible howls with which the process was accompanied.

"There," he cried, when he had finished, "you are disposed of now, Mr. Craddock! And you may amuse yourself by cursing the tree, which is close enough to your teeth, until some one comes by who is willing to release you."

Mr. Craddock was now rendered so furious at finding himself in this ignominious situation that, without thinking of the consequences, he gave a snatch with all his might, thinking that he might by this means snap the cord.

But all he did was to force a cry of great agony from his lips, for the rope showed no signs of giving way whatever, and the force he had made use of cut his flesh almost to the bone.

"Try it again, my friend!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "You didn't half try that time! Take my advice, and give another good pull—you will be able to tell better then how strong the rope is."

Mr. Craddock cursed and swore horribly.

"It's no good," Turpin continued. "And what is more, you will not be able to deny having been robbed, as you might have done had you rode off quietly, as I was quite willing to allow you to do. It is all your own bringings on, and you have no one in the world to blame but yourself."

Mr. Craddock howled again.

"I have not done with you yet," his tormentor went on. "There shall be no mistake about the matter—I will take good care of that!"

Turpin's next proceeding was to open Mr. Craddock's own pocket-book, and upon one of the blank leaves in it he wrote these words:—

"Robbed this morning by Dick Turpin, who discovered the cheat so long practised, and therefore emptied his pockets. Afterwards, for a cowardly, treacherous shot, was tied by the said Dick Turpin to this tree, in order to afford him the opportunity of thinking over his present and future prospects."

The words Dick wrote in a large and certainly indifferent hand, but he took care to wet the point of the black-lead pencil at every letter, and to bear very heavily upon the paper, so that there should be no fear of any of the words being easily effaced.

This done, Dick pinned the paper on to the back of Mr. Craddock's coat, from whence, as he knew very well, he could not remove it himself.

"I will leave you now," said our old friend, after giving an approving glance at what he had done, "and I hope some time will elapse before anyone chances to make his way past this spot."

Mr. Craddock continued to swear in the most frightful manner, but this did not afford him the slightest aid in releasing himself from his bonds, though possibly his angry feelings were somewhat soothed by it.

Having now done all that he intended, Dick leisurely mounted Black Bess, and rode towards the spot where Maud was waiting for him, for she had faithfully observed his injunctions, though she had nevertheless been a witness of all that had taken place.

"Oh, Dick," she ejaculated, as soon as he was near enough to hear her voice, "you are sure you were not injured by that treacherous shot?"

"Not in the least, I assure you," was the reply. "And I feel comfortable now, because I have paid him for it in a style which he will not easily forget."

"Shall you leave him where he is?"

"Certainly I shall! Of course, before many hours elapse, some one will pass by and release him."

"And what was that you wrote?"

Dick told her.

Maud looked grave.

"Surely," she said, "that was most unwise!"

"Why so?"

"Why? Because now they will have certain knowledge of your presence hereabouts."

"It does not matter," he replied. "It is my intention to quit the inn. I cannot make up my mind to remain any longer in a place for which you manifest so much aversion."

"But there are other things to be considered besides my fancies."

"It may be so, but your inclinations shall not be wholly disregarded for all that."

"What is it, then, you think of doing next?"

"Why, getting down somewhere in the neighbourhood of the place we have agreed to visit."

"Stonehenge?"

"Yes, I believe we shall be safer there. At any rate, we shall be more miles from London, which is to us the seat of danger."

Against this proposition Maud had not a single word to say.

Not only was she most anxious to quit the ill-omened roof of the inn for ever, but she fully and entirely believed that they would be in more safety if their distance from London was increased.

Maud was not a little surprised, though at the same time she felt gratified in a very high degree, at finding Dick so observant of her comfort and happiness.

Moreover, she fancied that of late she had detected, not only in the accents of his voice, but also in his glances, a greater amount of tenderness than he had ever before displayed.

She was too delighted in making this discovery to think of speculating upon the feelings and causes which had given rise to it, but she was conscious of the existence of a greater amount of happiness in her breast than she could remember having possession of before.

By this time it had begun to grow quite light, and therefore Maud rather anxiously inquired of Dick whether it was his intention to retrace his steps.

"Very shortly," he said. "But first of all, I expect to have a little bit of game arrive in a few minutes—a

chance which I would not miss on any account, for not only does it promise some sport, but I feel certain it will turn out profitable. Hark!"

While he was addressing these words to Maud, our hero had caught the sound of horsemen approaching.

A moment's listening convinced him that he had not been mistaken.

"Now, Maud," he exclaimed, "once more retire into the shadow of this hedge, and I will ride on to meet them."

"Be careful."

"I will indeed."

"Promise me," said Maud—"promise me that you will continue to think favourably of what I assure you is the darling wish of my heart, and that which will serve to make my happiness complete."

"I will, but bear in mind that much money will be required."

"Alas!" she sighed, "there is that obstacle."

"But the amount will soon be less than it is even now, for the booty I hope to obtain in a few moments will prove no inconsiderable one. But promise me not to quit your place of safe shelter."

"I promise."

"And I, too, promise," said Dick, with that tenderness in his voice and eyes which it so thrilled Maud to listen to and see. "I will make a promise, and it is that if my companions will give their consent, we will quit England for good as soon as ever an opportunity displays itself."

"Are you quite sure—quite in earnest?" she asked, with her eyes brimming with the tears that excess of joyfulness had called there.

"Quite. I cannot stay to say more, or the chance will be lost."

In good truth, Dick had permitted the approaching horsemen to come very near to where they stood, for the clatter of hoofs now overpowered every other sound.

As he spoke the last words, however, Dick galloped down the road towards the travellers.

As for Maud, she felt so overcome with happiness as scarcely to be conscious of where she was, or what Dick was about.

She did, indeed, find it hard to believe that she had really heard the words which had just been spoken.

It seemed far more likely that she was the victim of some extraordinary delusion, for hitherto, when hoping that Dick would quit his dangerous profession, she had not been able to conceal from herself that she was in reality hoping against hope.

She could not be dreaming.

There around her lay the usual features of an English landscape.

The light early morning breeze was rustling among the topmost branches of the trees.

The first rays of the new-dawning sun were beginning to glint upon the more lofty objects with which she was surrounded.

No, no, it was no dream and no delusion—for she could hear still the beat of horses' hoofs.

Suddenly, however, the sounds ceased and the distant murmur of voices floated to her ears.

CHAPTER MLL

CONTINUES TO RELATE DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURES.

LEAVING Maud to bear with the suspense which she had to endure as best she might, we will, as usual, follow in the footsteps of the highwayman.

Ere he had gone many yards he caught sight of two mounted men approaching, who, upon seeing him, discovered certain signs of uneasiness and irresolution.

Dick was sure that they were no other than those friends to whom Mr. Craddock had confided his very valuable secret, and who had agreed to put his *ruse* into practice.

Our hero was rather curious to see how they would manage the matter. It was scarcely to be expected that they would succeed as well as the originator of this very clever idea, because they were not in possession of so great an amount of impudent assurance.

"Hold, gentlemen," cried Dick, placing himself directly in their path—"hold—hold, I say! You cannot proceed any further on your journey until you have transacted a little business along with me."

They came to a standstill without any hesitation, and at the same moment Dick produced a pistol, which had upon them a decidedly uncomfortable effect.

"Now, gentlemen," Dick went on, after having satisfied himself that his weapon was in perfect readiness for instant use, "there is no reason why you should be delayed many minutes upon your journey, for all I require of you at the present time is the whole of the articles of a valuable nature—money included—which you carry with you. When you have placed that in my hands you are at perfect liberty to ride off—no further molestation will be offered you, I assure you."

The extraordinary coolness of this speech seemed to dumfounder the travellers.

Some moments elapsed before they were able to move, or to remember what it was they had agreed to do.

During this interval Dick sat in the saddle, considerably enjoying their utter state of bewilderment.

"Come!" he said, when he considered he had waited long enough. "My patience is entirely exhausted; and though I don't wish to proceed to extremes, yet I must assure you that if you do not comply with my request unhesitatingly, I shall be compelled to use force."

"But, my dear sir—"

"Well?"

"We—we—we are—"

"Highwaymen!" gasped the second, finding that his companion's utterance failed him, and would not allow him to pronounce the important word.

"Yes—we are both highwaymen ourselves," said the first, jerking out the words all at once in the most comical way imaginable.

"Are you indeed!" ejaculated Dick.

"We are."

"Then I am glad to hear it."

"Glad to hear it?"

"Yes, because a highwayman will never refuse a request made to him by one of his comrades; and as I am badly in want of cash for a particular purpose, of course you will not object to place your pockets quite at my disposal."

Upon hearing these words the two travellers stared blankly at each other.

This was something for which they were not in the least prepared, and they fervently wished Mr. Craddock had been a little more explicit, and told them what he should have done under such circumstances.

"Silence, I presume, in this, as in other cases, denotes consent," pursued Dick. "As I am in a hurry, be good enough not to keep me any longer waiting."

"My dear sir—"

"Yes, my very dear sir—"

"As dear as you like."

"What a joke—what a capital joke! Ha, ha! Do you see the joke? Ha, ha! Capital!"

"Yes, capital," muttered the other, trying hard to force a laugh.

"Then, excuse me," interposed Dick, "you have both considerably the advantage of me, for I am forced to confess that I don't see any joke at all."

The artificial merriment of the two travellers subsided into absolute amazement.

"I must be plain and straightforward with you," said Dick, at length. "I see I am obliged to be so."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, let me tell you that I happened to overhear all that passed at the inn between Mr. Craddock and yourselves. Ha, ha! I can see a joke now! Can you?"

If they did see it they certainly did not seem to appreciate it in the slightest degree, for they sat on their horses' backs as though they had been changed from humanity to stone.

"I don't want to come to hard measures," Turpin went on; "but I am determined to possess myself of all the valuables you carry, and I leave you to make your choice whether you quietly surrender them to me, or whether you will compel me by main force to take them from you. In either case the result will be the same."

"No—no! Dear, good, kind sir, have mercy upon us!"

"I intend to be merciful."

"Thanks—many, many thanks!"

"But for all that, I intend to have your cash, so hand over before my patience is worn out!"

Both groaned heavily.

Dick raised his pistol.

"I shall count nine," he said, "and if, by the time I have finished doing so, you do not begin to show me the contents of your pockets I shall have to bring the services of this little tool into requisition."

The sight of Dick's holster pistol—he had purposely selected the most terrifying one he had with him—made them shake in their shoes for dread.

Dick began to count in a very deliberate tone of voice.

"Stop—stop!" cried one, as Dick cried "Eight!" "I cannot stand this any longer!"

So saying, he dived his hand into his pocket.

Dick extended his left hand, allowing the reins to fall upon the neck of Black Bess, for he knew very well she would stand still without any restraint.

This first traveller produced a very stout pocket-book, which was crammed so tightly that it seemed in danger of bursting.

It slipped into Dick's pocket with the greatest celerity.

"Now then," he cried, "follow on with your purse, your loose cash, and your watch! Be quick, for time is precious!"

The traveller looked around him with a glance so ludicrously despairing as would provoke a smile from almost any beholder.

But there was no one near at that early hour.

Finding that it was vain to resist, and that he had no other resource save compliance, the traveller made a virtue of necessity, and emptied all his pockets, satisfying Dick that there was nothing left in them by turning each successively inside out.

Having finished with him, he next turned to his companion, who, of course, now was not in a position to think of offering resistance of any kind.

Refusal was out of the question, so he followed the example of the other in every respect, though he accompanied every one of his actions with many heavy groans and dismal shakings of the head, not even putting up with his loss with as much calm philosophy as his associate.

"And now," Turpin exclaimed, "I should just like to make a remark or two before we separate. In the first place, if you will take my advice you will never try this trick again, or, if you do, rehearse the part you have to perform much better, otherwise you will infallibly be known not to be highwaymen at the very first glance."

"I never will," muttered one, in a tone that was conclusive as to his sincerity.

"Nor I either."

"Then as for your very ingenious friend, Mr. Craddock," continued Dick, "I have some interesting information to give you concerning him."

Upon hearing this, the pair pricked up their ears.

"He tried his plan upon me, but I need scarcely tell you he found it of no avail, and in the end he had to clear his pockets of every article."

"Did he indeed?" they ejaculated, with evident satisfaction.

No doubt it was some solace to them, under the circumstances, to be made aware that their friend, after all his boasting, had not been able to escape.

"Just at the present time," Dick went on, "he happens to be so situated as to stand in need of your assistance, and if you ride down the road you will doubtless see or hear something of him. If he denies having been robbed, ask him to pay the gate just below here, and then you will know whether he speaks the truth or not."

With these words, Dick abruptly wheeled his mare round and galloped off before the travellers could recover themselves from their bewilderment.

Maud greeted Dick with a glad smile.

"No more adventures now," she cried.

"None; I have succeeded much better than I could have dared to anticipate. I have capital booty, which I have been lucky enough to obtain with very little risk and difficulty."

"And now you purpose returning to the inn."

"I do. Force your way through that gap. We will make our way across the fields, as by that means we shall save a mile or two."

Maud gladly enough complied, for now that it was daylight, she was most anxious for Dick to get back to the inn, for which place she by no means felt so much repugnance during daylight as at night.

As soon as the open meadows were gained, she looked about her with apprehension, for she was quite at a loss to imagine how it was that during the whole of the past night they had not once been interrupted by their foes, and therefore now naturally dreaded to catch sight of them.

Nothing, however, save the fair and smiling face of the open country met her view, and she began to indulge in the hope that they would be successful in reaching their destination unmolested.

Her mind being thus relieved upon this point, her thoughts naturally averted to what Dick had said to her respecting his accedence to her request.

"It seems too much happiness to be realised," she said, with a deep sigh. "I fear, somehow, I know not why, that it can never be."

"Nonsense, Maud; banish such fears as those—they are unworthy of you. Nevertheless, I don't scruple to tell you that I have been weak and foolish enough to be influenced by a vague presentiment of some coming ill; and without knowing why, I feel assured that if your wishes are carried into execution, a great calamity will be avoided."

These words struck a cold chill to Maud's heart, which seemed as though it had been plunged into ice, thus freezing up her life blood at its very source.

"Do not call any such feeling weak or foolish, Dick, but rather believe it to be some delicate instinct warning you of some hidden approaching danger. Let me beseech you not to disregard the whisperings of such an inward monitor."

"I will not," replied Dick—"I will not for your sake. At present, your life has been sacrificed to me; I can see by your wasted frame, your haggard look, the dullness of your eyes, and numerous other indications, how much the wild life you have so long led has told upon you. I wonder you have borne up so well as you have, for you were never fitted by nature for so many hardships."

"And yet I have been happy, Dick—quite happy in your love, and therefore quite content to bear all, and even more."

"But you shall be happier—of that I am quite determined. Now, when I see the ravages which have been wrought in your beauty, your countenance is a reproach to me; but it shall be so no longer."

Maud wept freely.

"Cheer up!" cried Dick—"let me implore you to cheer up! Our arrangement with Tom Davis and the rest must be carried out; but by the time a month has expired I trust we shall be safely on some bark taking our last look of the shores of England."

There was something saddening even in this.

In particular Dick felt how hard he should find it thus to exile himself from the land where he had passed so busy a career.

"Come," he cried, for he felt no inclination to pursue the subject further, "urge on your horse, Maud! The sooner we reach the Jolly Tar the better."

Upon this point it was impossible that any diversity of opinion could exist.

As before, Maud pushed her horse to the utmost speed he was capable of making, and Dick kept easily by her side.

The only interruption they met with in the course of their long ride was of so slight a character as scarcely to be worthy of the name.

It was while they were crossing a meadow of considerable extent.

Suddenly a loud voice was borne upon the air.

Looking behind them, they caught sight of a man mounted upon a very sturdy-looking roan cob.

He was alone, so whatever apprehensions our friends may have felt instantly subsided.

Seeing that he had attracted their attention, this individual waved his arms about in a very wild and extraordinary manner, while at the same time he hawled out something at the very top of his lungs.

But he was too far off for the purport of the words to reach Dick's ears. ●

"What does he want?" asked Maud.

"I fancy he is telling us that we are trespassing upon his property. He looks like a farmer, or landholder, or something of that sort. By his violent gesticulation I fancy he wants us to turn back."

"And we are not likely to do that."

● "Decidedly not. Push on faster, for as I live he is actually foolish enough to give us chase!"

Whether Dick's supposition was correct, or whether this stranger suspected who they were, is hard to say.

At any rate, he flogged his pony unmercifully with a stick he carried, and made him gallop over the turf at an astonishing rate.

It was quite out of the question, though, that he should succeed in overtaking Black Bess.

Such a thing would be too ridiculous.

Nevertheless, so good was the speed made by the pony, that it was not until they had crossed two more fields that they lost sight of him.

The cross-road now lay before them, and they made their way into it easily by means of a gate which Dick alighted and opened.

About the rest of their journey there was no difficulty whatever.

The Jolly Tar had always occupied a very lonesome situation, and now, in consequence of the dark deeds which had taken place in it, the vicinity was more shunned than ever.

Tom Davis, however, was awaiting their return with very great impatience and anxiety.

He shook his head as soon as he caught sight of them.

"I can't think it wise, captain, to venture back here by daylight in this manner. You are sure to be seen."

"It was unavoidable. Have the others returned?"

"Claude and Jack have."

"Not Tom King?"

"No."

"That is strange!"

"Very; and yet he may have had the prudence to conceal himself somewhere rather than run the risk of making his way here by daylight."

Dick could not fall in with this supposition.

He knew where Tom had gone, and it seemed far more probable to ascribe his absence to the fact of his having got into some serious trouble.

Of this private conviction, however, he uttered not one word.

At this moment Claude and Jack made their appearance at the back window of the inn.

They had stationed themselves on their return in the "look-out," for so they called that upper chamber, from which, as we have already informed the reader, they could obtain a view in any direction.

Dick soon discovered that his apprehensions concerning Tom King were fully shared in by his comrades.

There was just the hope that what Tom had said was correct, and this they had perforce to cling to during the whole of the day.

They determined to wait for him until midnight, and then, if he did not make his appearance, to come to some resolution as to how they should act.

The excursion of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack on that night had not been marked by an adventure of any particular or unusual character.

But they were successful in so far as the purpose for which they set out was concerned.

A good booty had been secured, and with very little trouble.

In one of the cross-roads the highwaymen had encountered a covered waggon—one of that kind in which people at that time often rode from place to place.

They guessed at once the nature of the load carried by the waggon on this occasion, and by threats compelled the driver to stop his team and to sit on his high seat without offering any opposition or resistance.

The people in the waggon were easily terrified into submission.

We have formerly stated that people who could afford another mode of conveyance often chose one of these waggons as holding out a greater prospect of safety than a stage-coach.

In the present instance our friends were so fortunate as to meet with an old avaricious fellow, who preferred to ride in a waggon not only on account of the reason just given, but because it was so much cheaper.

Although he at first declared he had nothing whatever, Claude made a search—a thorough one—and the result was the discovery of a large bag of money.

With this booty they rode off, leaving the man almost



[TOM KING IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH HIS DOOM.]

tragic at the loss of that which he actually prized above his own life.

The particulars of this adventure having been related, the whole of our friends betook themselves to rest, adopting the plan which on a previous occasion we in full described.

The approach of night was waited for with great impatience, and when it began to grow dusk the anxiety of all was so great that they, without exception, repaired to the look-out, hoping shortly to catch sight of their absent comrade.

The hours passed slowly and wearily, until at length Dick Turpin, consulting the watch he had taken from Mr. Craddock—which was a valuable repeater—announced that the hour of midnight had arrived.

But although they both looked and listened, they neither saw nor heard anything of Tom King.

No. 226.—BLACK BESS.

CHAPTER XLII

TOM KING LEARNS HIS FUTURE DESTINY.

We go back to our old friend Tom King, who was left in anything but comfortable circumstances, although the narrow escape he had just had from death made them more endurable than they would have been otherwise.

But Tom was most moved by the hapless fate which had befallen his companion, and he renewed his search again and again in the hope of discovering something of him.

All was in vain, however.

If the unfortunate stranger had really made his egress in the same manner as our friend, he must have been carried away completely by the stream, and this, judging from the nature of the place, seemed hardly probable.

The idea which fixed itself in Tom's mind was, that

the subterranean stream might at some point have branched off into two directions, one leading to the open air, the other conducting to some of those mysterious recesses of the earth of which the stranger had himself so graphically spoken.

Supposing this hypothesis to be correct, Tom had still further cause to congratulate himself upon the good fortune which had attended him.

Other and more pressing matters, however, now called upon him for immediate attention.

The loss of his horse must be repaired, and then his next and most important step was to make his way back to the place where he knew his friends were so anxiously expecting him, and make them acquainted with the success he had met with in the prosecution of the enterprise upon which he had been despatched.

But many difficulties stood in the way, which by many would have been deemed well-nigh insuperable, and yet which Tom thought but little of.

His first care was, if possible, to ascertain whether the police officers who had so nearly secured him, and who would infallibly have done so but for their own overreaching cupidity, were in the vicinity.

Tom's own opinion, formed after a careful survey of the place, was that they must be on the other side of the rock, unless, indeed, they had ventured to pass beneath the archway in a boat; then it would be hard indeed to say what had become of them.

After reconnoitring for some time, the coast seemed perfectly clear, and Tom having by this time recovered the use of all his limbs, and who felt that the proper circulation of his blood had been restored, at once turned his back upon the scene of this adventure, now intent upon obtaining his first necessary—a horse.

How he was to obtain one seemed in the highest degree mysterious, for he did not happen at that time to possess the sum of money that would be requisite for the purchase of one.

It is true that in some of the meadows around him he might have found an animal to answer his purpose, but then he would have been short of all the trappings—a deficiency, of course, which anyone not similarly situated to himself could easily have supplied.

While pondering over these matters Tom's attention was arrested by a light which he perceived dimly twinkling at some distance in advance.

At first being uncertain as to the source from whence the illumination proceeded, he advanced with considerable caution until he found that the light in question streamed from the side window of a roadside inn.

This discovery seemed to have the effect of causing him to feel with additional acuteness the discomfort of his present condition.

The imaginary prospect of a glowing fire and some blood-warming beverage arose most temptingly before him, and so strong was the effect produced that he found the inducement to enter was irresistible.

Accordingly, he approached with a more rapid step; but before he ventured to enter he peeped cautiously into the room from which the light was shining.

This he was able to do easily, for there was no curtain to obstruct his vision—the light, indeed, thus suffered to shine forth proving a beacon to many a belated traveller, who but for it might have wandered past the inn.

Tom found that he was looking into a room that evidently, from its character, was set aside for the accommodation of the public.

Straight before him was the hearth, upon which a huge wood fire was blazing, giving out so much light that the rays of the lamp were almost made invisible.

At this moment the room was occupied only by one individual, who sat with his back to the window and his face to the glowing embers, so that Tom was not able to note him very distinctly.

By his dress he would seem to be a gentleman.

From such a one as this Tom not unnaturally thought that he had little or nothing to apprehend, and so without further hesitation he advanced to the front door of the inn, opened it, and entered.

The noise which this occasioned had the effect of bringing the alert and attentive landlady forward.

But Tom had accurately noted the situation of the door communicating with the room into which he had peeped, and he opened it without ceremony.

The landlady followed him across the threshold

"Good evening," said Tom to her, advancing to the fire and nodding to the traveller who sat there. "You see, I have been so unfortunate as to get a ducking this cold night."

"Dear me, sir, so you have! What shall I do? How did it happen?"

"Why, curse it, it is not my only mischance to-night—I have lost my horse as well!"

"Lost your horse?"

"Yes; I wanted the confounded brute to leap a stream, which I am convinced he could have done easily enough, but he jumped short, and we both fell into the water."

"Was it near here, sir?" asked the stranger, who had looked at, and listened to, Tom with great attention.

"A mile or so," was the answer. "I cannot describe the exact spot, for I am a stranger in the locality. But what was worst was that I found the current so strong I could scarcely resist it. Being a good swimmer, though, I gained the shore, and strove to rescue my steed; but in the meantime he had floated to a great distance—to a place where the velocity of the current had so increased that he was carried along like a feather; and in spite of all my endeavours I had the mortification of seeing him drift under a rocky arch that leads I know not where—I should fancy into the bowels of the earth."

"I know well the spot which you describe," observed the traveller; "but it is considerably more than a mile from here. You may consider yourself lucky in having escaped with your own life. Had you passed beneath that arch you would never have been seen or heard of on this earth again."

"The gentleman says truly," added the landlady; "and you must consider yourself fortunate in having escaped so well."

"I do," answered Tom, with a smile, for he was thinking of the officers.

"But, dear me," continued the landlady—"here I am rattling to you in this fashion, and not thinking that those wet clothes will give you your death of cold. Let me show you to a bed-room, where you can remain until all your things are dry."

"Nay, nay—it does not matter. If you will bring me some boiling-hot brandy-and-water I will dry myself by this blazing fire. It is not the first time that I have been soaked to the skin, and without having the advantage of any fire at all. Perhaps, sir," Tom added, addressing the traveller, "you would favour me so far as to join me in discussing a glass hot and strong?"

"I have no objection—none in the world."

"Then, landlady, let us have two glasses with all possible speed. In the meantime I will make myself comfortable."

"You had better take my advice, sir."

"No, no—I shall do best here. Be quick, for I am cold without and within."

Tom hastily removed his upper clothing and hung it near the fire, and then warmed himself thoroughly.

"I think you are running a great risk," said the stranger, who had sat watching him for some time in perfect silence.

"It is nothing," answered Tom, carelessly. "I have seen hard service in my time, and have become inured to all these hardships."

At this moment the landlady reappeared; and after the exchange of some conversation, with which it is needless to trouble the reader, she again quitted the apartment.

By this time Tom began to feel very comfortable in his new quarters.

"What vexes me most of all," he remarked to his companion, "is the loss of my horse, which could not have taken place at a more unfortunate moment. I am anxious to reach a place some miles from here before daylight, and how I am to do it completely puzzles me."

"I think I can get you out of your difficulty."

"In what way, sir?"

"Why, at the present moment I happen to have a horse in the stable here which will just suit you, and which I am willing to part with for a reasonable sum."

"I am much pleased to hear you say as much," responded Tom King, with great heartiness. "It has relieved me of an immense amount of uneasiness."

"I am delighted to hear it!"

"You could not confer a greater favour upon me than by allowing me the opportunity of making this purchase," said Tom. "And if you have no objection we will, after we have drained our glasses, pay a visit to the stable."

"With all my heart!"

It may seem strange that Tom should manifest so much readiness to purchase a horse at a time when he had no means of paying for it.

Either he forgot the state of his exchequer, or else he had devised some plan for dispensing with the necessity of payment.

The pair sat together for some little time—the stranger insisting upon two more glasses being brought, and Tom did not wish to leave until his clothing was completely dried.

The stranger, too, had an object in calling for more brandy—he believed he should be enabled to drive a better bargain.

But he had got the wrong person to deal with.

The glasses at last were emptied, and they rose and repaired to the yard, Tom's apparel being now quite dry and comfortable again.

The traveller was in excellent spirits, doubtless in consequence of the largeness of the profit he was about to make.

Some little delay took place in arousing the ostler; but at length that individual made his appearance, carrying a large stable lantern.

By the aid of the article last mentioned Tom made a tolerably good examination of the horse, which, so far as he could tell, was of an average good quality, and free from blemishes and faults.

"What do you think of him?" asked the traveller, somewhat anxiously.

"Why, I believe he will suit me admirably."

"I feel sure he will. Have him led out into the yard, you will be able to judge better of him then."

To this proposition, of course, Tom King did not for a moment dissent, and accordingly the steed was led out.

In his own mind our friend thought, possibly, that the animal might be worth twenty guineas, and the trappings five guineas more.

"There is only the price," he said—"I should like to know the price."

"Well, I shall not have many words about that," was the reply. "It is a good beast, and suits me very well, and I only part with him for your accommodation. The price is one hundred guineas."

The traveller made this extortionate demand with some trepidation, showing that he had a certain amount of conscience left.

He fully expected that Tom King would make some remark upon the price; and the stranger was, as the reader will readily believe, prepared to make a considerable abatement; but, to his surprise, Tom never opened his mouth or seemed in the least astonished, which was more than the ostler did, for upon hearing so monstrous a sum demanded he grinned from ear to ear.

The next feeling in the stranger's mind was that of disappointment.

He actually wished he had asked more, for Tom's behaviour impressed him with the idea that it would not have been deemed too much.

"I like him," Tom remarked, at length. "The price is high; but then one must expect to pay for an accommodation according to its value. Now, I would rather pay a thousand pounds than not reach my destination at the time appointed."

"Then you think we may say the matter is settled?"

"Well, nearly so. I confess, if you have no objection, that before paying for him, I should just like to try him for a hundred yards or so. I have no doubt I shall be satisfied with him, however."

"Of course you will."

The stranger hesitated a little about allowing Tom a trial, but he was afraid to refuse, lest by doing so he should altogether lose the capital bargain he believed he was about to make.

"What do you say?" asked Tom, observing his indecision.

"Oh, I don't mind! Ostler," he said, "just fetch the saddle and bridle!"

These articles quickly made their appearance, and in a few seconds the horse was fully caparisoned.

"He looks all the better now," observed the owner, patting his horse upon the neck, though when he performed the action he did not know it would be for the last time.

Tom was in the saddle in a twinkling, for he felt by no means assured that the stranger would not alter his mind.

He walked quietly out of the inn-yard into the road, and then, having seated himself to his satisfaction, trotted off.

As he receded the stranger felt very uneasy.

He watched keenly, but Tom King rode on in the most careless manner.

The traveller's anxiety had reached its highest pitch—he was, indeed, about to give utterance to a shout, when Tom turned back again.

Oh, what a relief that was!

Our friend, with an amount of audacity of which few would have dreamed, let alone put into practice, rode back to the front of the inn.

"Well," ejaculated the stranger, "what do you think of him now?"

"My opinion has undergone no alteration."

"I rejoice to hear it. I assure you you become his back excellently. Don't he, Jack?"

"Rather!" responded the ostler, who was the individual appealed to.

"Well," exclaimed Tom, gathering the reins in his hand, "it seems we are all of one opinion. Good night to you both! The settling can stand over till another day."

Just as he pronounced these words, the highwayman gave his new-found horse so sharp a dig with his spurs that the animal, snorting with pain, first reared upright, and then, with a tremendous bound, set forward on his journey.

Simultaneously with that bound came four distinct and different sounds, which, uniting, swelled into a horrible and discordant chorus.

Of course we shall be compelled to mention these sounds separately, leaving the reader to imagine what the effect would be when they were all heard together.

The first was a dreadful kind of whooping howl, which came from the traveller's lips upon realising that his horse was gone for ever.

The second was a loud shout from the ostler, who regretted the loss of his own fee more than he did the abduction of the traveller's horse.

The third was a shrill scream from the lips of the landlady, who had been brought to the front door of the inn by curiosity, and who witnessed with horror the decampment of one whom she had set down in her own mind as being a perfect gentleman.

The fourth and last was a loud burst of laughter given utterance to by Tom King, who was mightily amused at the success of his stratagem and the dismay occasioned by it.

Before any course of action could be decided upon, both horse and rider vanished from the view of those assembled at the inn-door by passing round a bend in the road about a hundred yards or so in advance.

The horse which Tom had so unexpectedly acquired was certainly no beauty as far as appearance was concerned. He was by far too wiry and bony.

But he possessed the virtue of being able to get over the ground in an amazing style; in fact, our old friend at first could scarcely believe that the animal had such powers of speed.

He was soon convinced of it, however, beyond all possibility of doubt, and he discovered likewise another recommendation—namely, that the horse possessed remarkable powers of endurance.

Under all these circumstances, Tom had good cause to congratulate himself.

"Serves him right!" he muttered to himself, as he thought of the traveller's disappointment. "He will doubtless think of me the next time he attempts to overreach anybody. The idea, now, of a hundred guineas for a screw like this! As to the people at the inn, I will call and make it right with them some day."

Other thoughts, however, of a more serious and important nature quickly drove all these considerations from his mind.

His stay at the inn had consumed much more time than he was aware of, and he was really doubtful whether he should be able to reach his destination before daylight.

This, of course, he was most anxious to accomplish, for he knew how intense would be the anxiety suffered by his comrades. Besides, he was also forcibly reminded that he stood greatly in need of rest.

These reflections induced him to urge his steed to yet more rapid motion.

The trees and hedgerows seemed to flit by him like shadows.

Suddenly there came upon his ears a loud shrill cry, and at the same instant a dark figure started up in his path.

Who or what it was he could not immediately ascertain, for either the cry or the sudden appearance of a dark object in its path, or both, terrified his horse exceedingly.

The animal gave such a bound that Tom was bumped violently upon the pommel of the saddle, and but for his long practice in the art of riding he would have been hurled to the earth.

As it was he was fortunate enough to retain his balance, but ere he could properly regain his seat his ears were assailed by the shrill tones of a voice which surely must have belonged to a female.

"Ha, ha! it is a brave deed, is it not, to injure and insult those who are aged and too weak to offer any resistance to oppression? A brave deed in good truth, but for once you are deceived! I possess both the power and the will to work harm to you and yours! Ay, and I will do it, and that at once! No—no, I will not suffer this! Have I, then, lived to be ridden down on the highway, and by the likes of you? No, no—a thousand—ten thousand times no!"

These words were poured out with a volubility of utterance truly surprising.

They were pronounced, too, with great emphasis and bitterness of tone.

Tom listened in amazement.

What he had done to call down all this anger upon his head he could not tell.

Straining his eyes in the darkness, he indistinctly and gloomily made out the figure of an aged woman, whose gaunt thin frame was enveloped in an old and tattered cloak.

From what she said it would seem that Tom had been near to riding her down; and what was more, she seemed impressed with the idea that it had been done purposely.

Such, however, was far from being the case, such an act being entirely opposed to Tom King's nature.

"My good woman—" he began.

"Good woman forsooth!" she shrieked, with more bitterness and discordance than ever. "Do not good woman me! I tell you that you shall rue this deed, and let it stand as a warning to others who would act as you have done!"

"Listen to me!" cried Tom, seizing upon the first opportunity of saying a word that had presented itself. "I assure you—"

"Ha, ha! It is vastly fine thus to attempt to palliate what you have done! But the excuse shall not avail you—not in the least!"

"Then, since you will not listen to reason, I will ride on," exclaimed Tom, who now concluded that he had some madwoman to deal with, and that it would be consequently useless to expostulate.

But the woman would not allow him thus to make his escape.

With a sudden spring she placed herself directly in his path, extending her arms like those of a phantom, and waving them furiously the while.

Tom's horse had not yet recovered from his first terror, and now it reared and swaggared, resolutely refusing to pass the strange-looking object.

In vain Tom goaded his horse with the spurs.

The animal only became more and more unmanageable, and, if possible, more determined not to advance.

"Ha, ha!" screamed the hag. "Why not make your steed ride over me now? You cannot do it! I defy you to do it! He will fling you to the earth first! My eye is fixed upon him, and he cannot disregard my gaze. No, no—you shall remain there until I make you acquainted

with your doom—that doom which, though you know it not, is fast approaching!"

In spite of himself, Tom could not help being sensible of an indefinable sensation of dread which crept over him.

"It moves you, then?" she shrieked, in continuation, and her eyes must have been keen indeed to have detected any alteration in Tom's manner. "That is because every word I utter finds an echo in your heart! What I speak is the truth! There shall come woe upon you and yours—evil for them is gathering like a cloud, and soon—very soon it will encompass them so that there will be no hope of escape!"

"I have no desire to listen to your idle words!" cried Tom, vehemently, and once more striving to urge his horse into motion.

"Idle do you call them? You will soon have cause to think of them differently. Your own end draws nigh! You are young—you are full of life and strength! But for all that you shall die: not under the hangman—your neck has once already been encircled by the gibbet's rope, and you deserve to end your days at Tyburn! But such shall not be your fate—such shall not be your fate!"

"Begone!" said Tom King, who was scarcely able to pronounce the word, so much was he overcome by these last startling words.

Well calculated, indeed, were they to produce a profound impression upon him.

By what mysterious means short of the supernatural could this woman—whose features he had not even seen—have become acquainted with this dark episode of his life? That she was acquainted with it was certain, though Tom could scarcely at the moment bring himself to credit it or believe that his ears had served him rightly.

"You are surprised," continued this strange being.

"Accept that as a proof and token of my power, and let it cause you to place reliance upon what I predict shall happen in the future. I tell you that your fate lies open and plain before me, and as easy to read as it would be if written in a book. You cannot avert your doom—you cannot escape it."

"Then let me know the worst at once," said Tom King, with sudden boldness. "I am tired of these indirect allusions. What have you to prognosticate? Tell me, and allow me to depart!"

"You are bold now—but what I have to tell will blanch your cheek and abate your haughtiness of tone."

"You are wrong—quite wrong! Tyburn Tree is all that I fear, and you have just told me that I shall not die there."

"Nor shall you—a worse fate awaits you!"

Tom laughed derisively.

"Nay, scoff not! You have a friend."

"More than one, I trust."

"Ay, now you have, but they will pass away ere long, and one only shall be left. That one is your staunchest, truest, oldest, and best friend—at his hands shall you meet your death!"

Tom laughed more scornfully than ever.

"Ay—ay, you may jeer and deride me; but wait—wait—you will find then that my prophecy is true."

"I laugh at it," said Tom, "and shall always do so. I hope I may live until my best friend takes my life."

"Vain, foolish wish! I tell you even your very days are numbered; and I repeat that you will die by the hand of your best friend. You need fear no other danger. You can court death in whatever shape you like, and it will not come to you—but from your friend you cannot escape."

"And I repeat that I hope I may live till then. And as for your prophecy, I say once more that I utterly despise it. Now let me pass."

"You say those words with your lips only, and you know full well that there is within your breast a still small voice against whose tones you cannot close your inward ears. I tell you, you are doomed! Forget my words if you can! Now pass on!"

With these words this mysterious person vanished as suddenly and as strangely as she had appeared, leaving Tom equally in the dark as to whence she had come and whither she had gone.

The highwayman's first impulse was to strike his spurs deeply into his horse's flanks, but in good truth the animal now needed little urging forward.

The sole obstacle to its onward progress was now removed, and it relieved itself of its terror by galloping from the spot at its utmost rate of speed.

So strange and rapid had the whole of this adventure been, that Tom could hardly bring himself to believe that it was a reality.

He fancied that his mind had played him some strange prank—that he had been the victim of some singular delusion or waking dream.

As he reflected, however, he soon came to the conclusion that the encounter had indeed taken place; and although he strove his best to do so, yet he was unable to banish from his mind the remembrance of the singular prediction.

"I will not waste another thought upon it," he muttered for the fiftieth time, as his horse continued its mad, headlong career through the darkness. "And yet how strange! What if, after all, it should come true? D'ye by the hand of my best friend! Why, that can be no other than—No—no, I can never credit it—it is too monstrous for belief!"

But in spite of such words as these, his thoughts would persist in recurring to this circumstance.

"Evil befall us all," was his next mental ejaculation.

"Well, I will think about that; it will go hard with me if I don't baffle her. I will persuade Dick and the rest to leave England with Tom Davis—whether we ever return again is another consideration. Yes—yes, that is what I will do. We will secure our safety while we have the chance."

The reader will not fail to notice the singular coincidence between the thoughts of Tom King and of Maud and Dick.

Was this to be taken as an omen of good or evil?

Time will show.

Upon Tom King's mind, however, remained a most disagreeable conviction—one which he tried hard to conceal even from himself, but, of course, without success. It was that the bond of fellowship which had so long existed was about to be broken up—that their long career of daring and perilous adventure was drawing to a close.

It is not surprising that his singular adventure should have left such an impression upon his mind, especially when we bear in mind the incidents which had latterly befallen him, the nature of which would be all sufficient to dim and overcome the most powerful intellect.

His preoccupation prevented him from making use of that amount of caution which is requisite to safe progress; and all at once his horse gave a sudden plunge, and before Tom knew what had happened, he found himself lying at full length in the roadway.

He had been sitting carelessly in the saddle, and the unexpected movement upon his steed's part had been sufficient to unhorse him.

Muttering some angry execrations, Tom scrambled to his feet.

The horse, having performed this feat, stood perfectly still, with its eyes fixed upon, and its ears pointed towards, the object which had terrified him.

Cursing the unruly beast, Tom walked gently towards him, and was fortunate enough to grasp the rein just at the moment when he was about to gallop off.

By this time the intense darkness which had hitherto prevailed was beginning to dissipate.

There was a chill gray light about the eastern portion of the sky which gave to every object a spectral-like, unnatural appearance.

A thin white mist also hovered over the surface of the earth.

Tom shivered as he rapidly brushed the dirt from his apparel.

Beyond a good shaking and a few bruises, he had not sustained any injury from his fall.

"Curse you!" he ejaculated, bestowing a sharp blow upon the brute. "What had you to be frightened at, I wonder? Ha, I see now!"

As he uttered these words, Tom became silent, and gazed with an intensity only equalled by that of his steed upon the object before him.

It was a double gibbet, from whose time-blackened arms two mouldering corpses were depending, looking, in that dim light, and viewed through the floating mist, ten thousand times more horrible than they could have done under any other circumstances.

A chill, damp breeze was blowing, which in itself was most depressive to the mind.

It lifted the hair from Tom's face, ruffled the mane upon his horse's neck, and whistled with a wailful, melancholy sound through the mass of ironwork in which the bodies of the malefactors were enclosed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN ARE DISAGREEABLY INTERRUPTED.

"I do not wonder at your terror," Tom at length ejaculated, apostrophising his steed, and turning shudderingly away. "In good truth, it is a most loathsome spectacle."

The highwayman spoke truly.

It would have been hard to find anything else so soul-chilling.

It would, too, be impossible to conceive anything more desolate and forlorn than his surroundings.

The double gibbet was situated at one corner of a large piece of waste ground or common, over the vast level surface of which the mist rolled like an ocean of vapour.

A moment or two elapsed before Tom could summon up strength of mind sufficient to avert his eyes from the dreary scene.

Dismal, unutterable thoughts thronged unbidden into his mind.

The recollection, however, that he had some miles to go before he reached his destination had the effect of arousing him.

He turned round quickly.

The old hag's prophecy was near proving a false one, I fancy!" he murmured, as he settled himself in the saddle, thinking the while of the narrow escape which he had had from receiving a fatal injury by his fall.

The next moment he was galloping swiftly on his way, for his horse, having perhaps discovered that the gibbet was an immovable object, no longer hesitated to pass it.

Without any further accident or mischance, Tom succeeded in reaching the Jolly Tar.

His approach had been described from afar, and his appearance had been heartily hailed by his comrades on the watch.

"You have kept us in a state of great suspense, Tom," were Dick Turpin's first words. "I do believe this night is one of the longest I ever spent. But what a terror you are in! What has happened?"

"You shall know all presently."

"You seem faint and languid."

"I am—I am! But you shall know all."

"Enter, then—enter! Tom Davis shall see to your horse—I see it is a fresh one."

"Yes—yes!"

"We had made up our minds to wait no longer than midnight for you; but when the hour arrived without your making your appearance, we resolved to give you a few moments more, and so we have remained procrastinating our intent until the present moment."

The conversation was changed as they made their way into the interior of the building.

A glass of brandy brought from the cellar served to revive Tom considerably; and having swallowed it, he proceeded to make his friends acquainted with what had befallen him.

The account of his capture was listened to with the most absorbing interest, and although he was congratulated on the skill and address which he had shown in procuring his liberation, yet all expressed it as their opinion that this disappointment would have the effect of rendering his foes more furious than ever, if indeed it was possible for this to be the case.

For some reason, but what it would have puzzled him to tell, Tom King withheld all mention of his singular meeting with the hag, so that his comrades remained in entire ignorance of the strange prediction.

Tom would have liked very much to persuade himself that he adopted this course of action because he placed no importance on the incident, but had he been pressed closely he could not have made this avowal truthfully.

His narration having been brought to a conclusion, he withdrew to obtain that rest of which he stood so much

In need, having first made an arrangement that the succeeding night should be devoted to a consultation.

To Tom himself the intervening hours passed rapidly enough, for he did not awake until just as the shades of evening were closing in, the task of keeping watch being taken upon by his companions.

It was just when evening was changing into night that they all assembled themselves before a fire in the apartment they had hitherto occupied, and which the ruddy light from the fire caused to have far from an uncomfortable appearance.

When we say all, we except Tom Davis.

It was thought he could best be spared from the discussion which was about to take place, and so he was set to watch in the upper chamber, though the length of time which they had remained unmolested began to have its usual effects—namely, to beget a feeling of false security.

They all looked to Dick to speak first, but on this occasion he would have preferred to hear the opinions of his comrades first.

But they would not for a moment listen to this arrangement.

"Well, then," said Dick, with a smile, and glancing at Maud while he spoke, "I fancy what I have to say will take you all by surprise; but yet I hope, for all that, that you will give the subject due consideration."

"We are sure to do that, Dick," said Claude Duval, "because we know you would not broach the matter unless you had considered it well beforehand."

"Well, then, it is that we should all, for a time at least, quit the shores of England in company with Tom Davis."

"Quit England!" cried the rest in chorus: Tom King because he was amazed at hearing that which he intended to propose himself, and Claude and Jack because such a course of action had never once entered into their imaginations.

"You are astonished," Turpin continued, "which is just what I expected. But the first shock of your amazement being over, I think several things will present themselves to you that will induce you to think favourably upon the subject."

"It is most extraordinary," responded Tom, "for I myself intended to propose the self-same thing."

"Is it possible?"

"It is more, for it is true; and I fancy Claude and Jack will not be long in seeing the policy of this course of action."

"But," asked Jack, "is it your intention to quit England for ever?"

"That had better be reserved for future consideration."

"Because," continued Jack, "if that had been your thought, I should have returned a negative at once."

"There is ample time to decide that. The question now is, whether we shall leave Stonehenge for the coast, and, taking a boat there, all make our way to France, and remain there until the popular excitement has calmed down a little?"

There was a pause.

Maud waited with bated breath for the result.

Although Dick had spoken only of a temporary exile, she hoped that when she had once got him away from England her influence would be sufficient to prevent him from returning.

"Do you see any objections to the course proposed?" Dick asked, at length, upon finding that the silence remained unbroken. "If so, do not hesitate to speak out. I am only anxious to obtain your opinions."

"As I said," replied Tom King, "I am quite in favour of it."

"And I see no objection," added Claude Duval.

"Nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Then we may look upon the affair as settled?"

"I suppose so."

"The next thing is as to the funds in hand. I have formed what I believe to be a tolerably correct estimate, and I think there will be no need to engage in any more adventures just at present. When we leave here for Stonehenge, which must be shortly—as it is impossible to say how long we may be detained upon the road—we will separate, and each follow our own inclinations."

Scarcely had these words been pronounced than a hasty footstep was heard without.

The next moment Tom Davis made his appearance upon the threshold.

There was an expression upon his face which spoke plainly enough, without the aid of words, telling his friends that something was amiss.

"What is it?" Dick asked, springing to — bet

"Officers, captain!"

"Officers?" repeated the rest, following Dick's example.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Outside. I saw them from the look-out. You had better come and see for yourselves."

"But did they seem as though they had tracked us here?"

"I cannot answer that question, captain. I did not stay long enough to notice. Be quick! You ought to reconnoitre carefully."

In this all agreed, and there was an immediate stir.

"Do not be so much terrified, Maud," said Dick, observing that she clung very tightly to him, and that even her lips were white. "The danger is not so great as you seem to think it—indeed it is not! Perhaps these officers may know nothing of our being here, their presence being merely accidental; and if so, they will ride by, leaving us in peace, for there is nothing in the exterior of this place of such a character as to create suspicion."

These words calmed Maud somewhat, and her heart fluttered rather less painfully than it had done a few moments before.

"I don't know how it is, Dick, and you will laugh at me, I daresay, for having what you will of course call a foolish notion."

"What is it, Maud?"

"Why, this sudden and unexpected realisation of my wishes does not seem to fill me with that joy which I expected. On the contrary, I feel a strange and altogether indescribable calmness, and—and—"

"And what?"

"Over all is a presentiment that something will occur that will prevent the carrying out of our arrangements."

This little conversation passed during the ascent of the stairs; but by the time the last words were uttered the look-out was gained, and so Dick was prevented from returning any reply to Maud's last remark.

Not that Dick altogether regretted this, for there was an aching pain in his breast which seemed sympathetic with Maud's feelings which would have rendered a cheering response difficult, if not impossible.

The various points of espionage were now immediately occupied, and a quick search made for the police officers.

The night was rather dark, but yet the obscurity was not so great as to prevent them, from that elevation, obtaining a tolerably good view of contiguous objects.

"That's the place, captain," said Tom Davis, in a faint whisper—"that's where I saw them! Are they there now?"

Dick looked closely, and at the first glance saw that Tom Davis had not given a useless or unnecessary alarm.

Coming slowly along the lane was a body of police officers.

All were mounted, and as they rode the clanking of accoutrements could be occasionally heard, showing that they were fully armed.

They were making their way steadily along the lane in the direction of the inn, from which, when Dick first caught sight of them, they were not much above ten yards distant.

"Close quarters!" whispered Claude Duval, at this moment, looking over Dick's shoulder.

"Much too close to be pleasant."

"What are they after?"

"That is what puzzles me."

"Are they coming here?"

"I fear so. What else but the intention of paying a visit to this place can have induced them to make their way into this desolate, deserted region?"

"We had better be off, then."

"Wait a moment. We had better not be too precipitate. We cannot leave even now without discovering ourselves."

"Very true."

"Then, as I need scarcely tell you, there is just the bare possibility that their errand may not concern this place in the least degree, and we may have the satisfaction of seeing them ride by."

"We may, but I doubt it."

"We shall see."

"Certainly we shall. But take look at that fellow there—I mean the one with the staff yonder."

"Yes, yes—I see him."

"He is most certainly pointing to the place, and he and his companions are as certainly talking about it."

"Nothing more likely; but still, at the same time, their conversation may only refer to the deeds which they have heard of as having been enacted here."

"It may be so, possibly."

"At any rate, we can only remain here as we are, and await the event."

"Just so."

This whispered conversation had been listened to by the other members of the little group.

But we cannot stay now to particularise the n.

The next few moments were moments of the most intense anxiety to our friends, though none would have thought so from the profound silence which prevailed.

On came the officers at the same slow and steady pace.

They were talking to each other, for the murmur of conversation ascended to the ears of the listeners, but it was indistinctly, nor, in spite of all their efforts, were they able to make out one articulate word.

The suspense grew greater and greater.

In the course of another moment the officers reached the front of the inn, and no sooner had they reached this position than, owing to the slope of the roof, our friends were unable any longer to observe their movements.

But they could listen.

The tread of the horses' feet was still audible.

Suddenly a loud voice pronounced the word:

"Halt!"

In an instant ensued considerable confusion, but it quickly died away, as one after another the officers succeeded in bringing their animals to a standstill.

"Dick," whispered Claude, "we have waited too long."

"Not at all," was the reply; "it would have been little short of madness to have left earlier."

"What is to be done?"

"There is yet time, if we only retain our calmness and make use of proper expedition."

"Issue your instructions, then."

"The officers have taken no measures at present to surround the place, so that I have no doubt we shall get off all right. Descend the stairs speedily and silently. The sooner we get to the stable and have the horses in readiness for travelling the better."

No sooner were these words pronounced than they set about obeying them.

Dick looked to his weapons.

Maud watched him closely.

"The danger is great," she said—"very great!"

"No—no, not at all. I believe we shall get off without the officers being any the wiser until they are too late to act."

"Then you think they are not aware of our presence here?"

"I am certain of it, or they would have made widely different arrangements."

"Just at this moment they reached the foot of the staircase, which happened to be at no very great distance from the front-door."

Here they paused a moment as though by common consent.

"D—n the lock!" said a voice. "What the devil ails it?"

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Matter? Why, the key won't turn a bit. Here, you try!"

The rattling of the key in the lock now followed, and an effort was made to open the door.

"Are you sure it was not fastened on the inside?"

"Fastened on the inside, you booby? Don't I tell you this is the way we came out, and Bob Paterson locked it and gave me the key!"

"Then Bob ought to be here to unlock it, for I'll be

d—d if I can! I tell you I am sure it is fastened on the inside."

Dick and his friends did not wait to hear any more, though it was evident that a very angry discussion ensued, for the police officer in command was one who could not brook the least contradiction.

What they heard impressed our friends with the hope that they should yet have time to get away before their foes were aware of their presence.

All regretted, though, that they should be compelled to quit their present quarters so soon, for now there would be no returning to them, as immediately upon the officers forcing an entrance they would find traces of the house having been inhabited, even if they did not hear them in the act of effecting their retreat, which was a very likely thing indeed.

The back part of the inn was reached in silence and with great rapidity.

One after another they passed with all possible speed through the window, and then flitted across to the stables.

There were many nimble hands at work, and the horses were quickly provided with their trappings.

Maud was left just outside the stable-door, in order to give timely warning should any of their foes approach.

"Quick!" she murmured. "I fancy I can hear them coming round this way."

"One more moment, and we shall be ready."

"The attack on the front door has ceased. Yes, yes, they are coming round to the back—they are here!"

As she spoke the words, Maud entered the stable hastily and closed the door, for had she retained her former station the officers must have seen her.

"How cursedly awkward!" growled Claude Duval, under his voice. "Another half-minute, and we could have been in the saddle and off."

"Hush, hush!" said Dick. "Let us watch them; perhaps there is no immediate cause for alarm."

This was a strange speech, but Dick's companions understood it.

Once more, then, were the whole of their energies concentrated upon the task of watching closely every movement made by the officers.

The one in command must have come to the conclusion that the front door had been fastened in some mysterious way or other, and seemed to have made his way round to the back, as though aware it would be easier to gain admittance from that quarter.

They all went direct to the back door, which, as our friends knew, was well fastened—so well, that our friends had preferred making their way in and out of the window to unfastening it.

"This is as fast as the other, sir."

"I thought so—we took every pains to make it secure."

"Then who could have fastened the front door?"

"Never mind bothering your stupid head about that! We will break this door down—it don't seem so strong as the other. I am determined to get in somehow!"

"We want something heavier than we carry to do this job, sir. What can we have?"

"Look about—you will be sure to see something."

"Shall I look in the stable yonder?"

"Yes, d—n you!—wherever you like! And as for the rest, let them commence the job with their pickaxes, and then we shall have the door down before you come back!"

Notwithstanding the taunting, sneering manner of his chief, this obtuse, wrong-headed police officer made his way direct to the door of the stable.

The question now was, what should our friends do?

They felt very undecided.

To prevent the approach of this man was impossible, while, if he entered, discovery must ensue.

"What is to be done, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"Let him come in. Keep out of the way, all of you, and as soon as he is fairly inside, seize him and prevent him from crying out."

"But what good will that effect?"

"Hush—hush! Obey—there is no time to discuss the point now."

The police officer was indeed almost on the threshold.

No resource was left for our friends save to obey their

captain's commands, and they immediately resolved to do so, trusting entirely to his sagacity.

The officer, upon reaching the stable door, gave it a push with his hand, and finding it yield, he at once advanced.

"It's d—d dark!" he said. "How the devil shall I find anything in here, I wonder? Hullo——"

That was the last word he had an opportunity of uttering, and it was spoken above a whisper, and that was all.

To his unutterable surprise, he felt himself seized tightly by two persons, while a third dashed his hand roughly before his mouth, and so effectually as completely to preclude the possibility of further speech.

"Secure him," said Dick, in a whisper; "and be as speedy about it as you can. In the meantime, I will keep a sharp look-out."

Upon looking through the doorway again, Dick saw that the officers were very busy with their cutlasses, and yet without producing any particular result.

The fact was the weapons were too light and by no means well adapted to the job; besides which, the door was composed of some unusually tough oak.

"We want something heavier, sir," said the police officers, desisting at length. "A sledge, now, would be the very thing."

"A what?"

"A sledge hammer."

"To be sure it is! But where is Partridge?"

Partridge was the name of the officer who had been so cleverly and silently secured by Dick's associates.

A general look was turned in the direction of the stabling.

"What can he be after? Has the rascal gone to sleep? Hi! Partridge—Partridge! Why the devil don't you answer?"

Partridge had a very good reason for not answering, had his commander but been aware of it.

While this little dialogue had taken place our friends had with nimble fingers strongly secured him by means of a rope, with which as well they contrived to gag him very effectually.

Moreover, Tom Davis stood over him with a loaded pistol.

"It's d—d odd," said the chief officer, "that he don't answer—d—d odd indeed! Partridge, I say!"

But, as before, no response was returned.

Up to this moment the existence of the little window which had served the highwaymen as a means of entrance and exit had escaped the notice of the officers.

Now one saw it, and hailed the discovery with a shout.

"Why," he said, "if we had but have seen this before we might have made our way in a dozen times over. Why, behold! the window is open!"

"That's d—d odd too!" remarked the chief officer. "But where's Partridge?—that's what I want to know!"

CHAPTER MLIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN TAKE THEIR LAST LOOK OF THE JOLLY TAR INN.

THE last words were uttered in a tone of suspicion and distrust, showing that at last the chief police officer had become conscious that there was something wrong.

What this was he had not sense enough to surmise, but he felt that he was upon the brink of some astounding discovery.

"Partridge!" he bawled, for the third time.

But, as before, Partridge replied not.

Meanwhile, our friends in the stable were not idle.

Dick had concerted his plan of operations, and he now proceeded to have them carried into execution.

Having seen Partridge composed of according to his instructions, he said:

"Now mount, all of you; and at the word of command be prepared to follow one another out as fast as possible. The officers will be so taken by surprise that they will be a moment or so before they recover themselves."

"Right, captain!" was the answer.

It was a desperate chance.

But yet Dick's comrades could see that it was their only one.

Accordingly they set about making their preparations with great alacrity.

The reader will scarcely require to be told that it did not take them many seconds to place themselves securely in their saddles.

As before, Maud shared Black Boss with Dick Turpin. She was terrified, but calm.

"When we ride out," whispered Turpin, as he drew her closely towards him, "be sure you bend your head as low down as you can, so as to avoid all contact with the top of the door. It is very low—you cannot stoop too much."

"I will be careful," she replied. "Do not trouble yourself to look after me, Dick—mind your own safety, and I will take care of myself."

"We are all ready, captain," whispered Tom King, at this juncture.

"Is Tom Davis mounted?"

"Yes."

"Then prepare! Ha! I fear, after all, we are too late! Quick—quick! Follow me! Charge—charge!"

These ejaculations were caused by the proceedings of the officers.

By this time they began to guess what had caused the detention of Partridge.

One happened, too, to hear the click of a horse's shoe against the rough bricks with which the stable was paved.

"There's some one in the stable, sir!" cried one of the officers—"I am sure of it!"

"Seize them, then! Forward—forward!"

But just at that precise instant of time, Black Bess dashed through the doorway of the stable with the swiftness of an arrow.

The officers were so taken by surprise by this sudden movement, that they drew back in order to escape from injury, and then remained just as they were, as though completely dumfounded.

"Good evening!" cried Dick, reining Bess up with such suddenness that she rose on her hind legs and pawed the air with her fore feet. "You seem taken by surprise by this sudden meeting. Here's wishing you success! Good-night, gentlemen. If you are inclined for a gallop across the country, say the word—I would not baulk your inclinations for the world!"

With these words on his lips, Dick turned and galloped off, and he had actually got several yards before one of the officers sufficiently recovered the use of his senses to fire a pistol.

"Dick Turpin, by all that's d—nable!" roared the chief officer. "Who ever would have dreamed that he was here—and all his gang, too? Fire—fire, my lads!—fire steady! Remember, the reward is just the same dead or alive!"

A straggling, dropping volley followed these words; but by this time all our friends had managed to get out of the range of the short, stumpy pistols that the officers at that time were so fond of using, and which were only effective in very close quarters.

"Oh, Dick," said Maud, "why did you terrify me by pulling up in front of them as you did? Surely that was an act of needless daring—I might call it mere bravado!"

"But we are safe."

"That does not make any difference."

"I think it does. Besides, I had a deeper motive than any which seems to have occurred to you."

"What was it?"

"Why, did you not see that I diverted the attention of the officers, and so was the means of enabling the others to make their way out of the stable in safety?"

"True; but it was at the hazard of your own life."

"I thought the risk not too great to be run; and you see the event has proved that I was quite right. Do they mean trying a gallop? Well, let them come on—I am ready for them."

Dick was quite right in what he said about diverting the attention of the officers.

It was in the highest degree generous of him to run the risk for his friends, but then it was no more than the reader would expect from him under such circumstances.

The plan answered admirably.



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD FIND A PLACE OF REFUGE.]

The police officers had eyes and ears for nothing else but him, so that his companions were enabled to quit the stable without any molestation whatever; and, as we have said, when the officers did make a demonstration against them, it was too late to be of any service.

But, furious with anger to think they had so grossly blundered about their work, and cursing their stupidity a thousand times over for not having thought before about what was the real state of the case, the officers rushed round to the spot where they had left their horses, and began to scramble into their saddles like so many demons.

But expeditions as they were in their movements, our friends were enabled to get an excellent start.

Away they swept over the meadows in a straggling, irregular line, intent upon making as much speed as they could, being well aware of the importance of doing so.

No. 227.—BLACK BESS.

They did not pull in the least until compelled to do so by coming to a piece of rising ground, up which they allowed their horses to proceed at a walk.

They were now able to get closer together than they had been hitherto, and also had the opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to speak.

Great exultation was in his tones.

"I must say," he cried, "that that was about as neatly managed as a thing well could be! Dick, that was a bit of your old spirit, and I was glad to see it, for I judged from the remarks you dropped to-night, that you were beginning to grow tired of the road."

Of the last part of this speech Dick Turpin did not think fit to take any notice, so he merely said:

"Of course you are all unhurt?"

"Yes, thanks to you!"

"It was splendidly managed, Dick," said Tom King,

in a voice of enthusiasm. "Nothing could be better."

Dick acknowledged the compliment with so profound a bow that a general laugh was elicited.

"They are coming," he remarked, after having cast a glance behind him. "They mean to give us all the trouble they can."

"They must be mad to think of chasing us."

"Yet they think of doing it. They are much exasperated, no doubt, and perhaps they flatter themselves that they will be able to hang upon our heels until they meet with assistance of some kind or other."

"Perhaps they do, but this hill will check their ardour."

"I fancy so."

"But we are nearly at the top. Had we not better arrange what we shall do?"

"What do you propose, captain?"

"Why, I think we cannot do better than take the present opportunity of carrying into effect that which we had just agreed upon."

"A separation?"

"Yes. Are you all agreed?"

There was a little discussion upon this question, but eventually an answer in the affirmative was given.

"Then let us part upon reaching the summit of this hill."

"And our meeting-place?"

"Stonchenge."

"About a month hence?"

"Yes, rather less than that time."

"And how shall we separate, captain?"

"That I will leave you to settle among yourselves. Remember to be punctual, and Tom King, my friend."

"Yes, Dick?"

"Don't forget to bring with you that nice little treasure which you buried. It will be most useful."

"I will not, you may depend."

"And remember," said Dick Turpin, "these last words: In all the adventures which you have between this time and that appointed for our meeting you have to keep in view one thing, and that is to make as much booty as you are able, for, rely upon it, we shall have good need of it."

"You may depend upon us, captain."

"Then now farewell! Disperse, and that will add not a little to the confusion of our foes. They will not know how to divide themselves so as to continue the pursuit with any prospect of success. Above all, be careful not to run into too much danger, because it will be difficult to afford assistance."

"Right, captain."

"Once more, then, farewell! It will be madness to linger longer."

"Farewell!"

"You, Tom Davis, follow me," cried Dick.

Not another word was spoken.

The brow of the hill had been reached a moment or so ago, and the officers, perceiving that the objects of their pursuit made a stand, pushed on with additional vigour in the hope of turning the circumstance to their own advantage.

No words of ours, however, can express the dismay and consternation which they experienced upon seeing the whole of the party suddenly break up and ride off in different directions.

What to do now they knew not, so they found themselves under the necessity of coming to a halt and holding a consultation.

It was at length decided what they should do.

"Let us follow Dick Turpin. His capture is worth the most money, and we are more likely to succeed if we do this than if we weaken ourselves by a division."

This proposition had everything to recommend it, so it is not surprising that it should be unanimously agreed to.

Not one relished the idea of separation, for they fully realised the strength which attended their union.

Perhaps, as some one was to be pursued, they could not have made a better choice for the highwaymen than Dick Turpin himself.

He smiled when he turned and saw what tactics they had resolved to adopt.

"Let them come," he said, "and I will undertake to

give them a tiring. Get ahead, Tom Davis, and let me see what speed that horse of yours is capable of making when hard pressed. Never fear but that Black Bess will keep up with you."

Tom Davis well understood what was required of him, and caused his steed to lay out in excellent style.

Despite her double burden, though, Black Bess kept just a pace or two in the rear, contriving to do so without manifesting the least exertion.

The officers, seeing that so good a start was made by the fugitives, grew more furious than ever, and spurred their horses so savagely that their track might have been followed by the drops of blood which dripped from the poor animals' panting flanks.

This barbarity, however, did not enable them to accomplish their wishes.

Although the spur was seconded with sharp lashes from the heavy riding whips they carried, they had the mortification of finding that the objects of their pursuit kept increasing the space there already was between them.

Maud glanced continually over Dick's shoulder.

At first she did so with uncontrollable trepidation; but when she saw that after all their exertions the officers kept dropping further and further into the rear her courage revived.

As for Dick himself, he was well aware that Black Bess could not sustain her double burden with impunity.

The strain must of necessity be greater, and the shorter its duration of course the better.

It was this which made Dick determine to put a period to the chase as speedily as possible, and long experience had taught him that the most effectual and speedy way to do this was to continue their rapid flight unhaltingly, so that the officers, finding their prey out of sight, should the sooner abandon the chase.

Not a very long time elapsed before the consummation of one of his purposes, for owing to the obscurity of the night he soon got quite out of view.

But the officers were able to follow the sound made by the horses' feet.

With a view of baffling them in this respect, also, Dick chose some soft marshy ground which, though rather heavy for travelling, yet, nevertheless, served to dull the sound raised by the concussion of the hoofs.

Not for long, however, did he continue thus.

As soon as ever he deemed it expedient, he directed Tom Davis to make his way to a large tract of woodland, which could be dimly distinguished in the distance, looking like a huge dark cloud.

"Gently, Tom," he added—"gently now! There is no longer the necessity for distressing your poor beast. Take it easy!"

But Tom did not slacken his speed much, for he could not help thinking that the officers were much too close behind them to be pleasant.

"Shall you seek shelter there, Dick?" Maud asked, pointing to the trees.

"I cannot tell at present, but I think it likely that I shall make use of it to baffle them—perhaps we may make our way completely through it."

"As you will—I leave all to you."

The trees now became at each moment more distinct, and Maud was surprised when she perceived the distance to which the wood stretched.

At length its confines were gained; and having reached this point, Dick called to his companion to pull up.

At the same time he drew rein himself, and wheeling Bess round, looked keenly and for a long time in the direction he had just come.

But the darkness completely hid his face from his sight.

Yet for all this they might be much nearer than would be at all agreeable, and, therefore, he directed Tom Davis to dismount and place his ear against the ground to listen.

Our old friend well understood the art of listening.

He remained stretched at full length for several moments, during which a profound silence was maintained.

At last he rose.

"I can hear nothing at all but that odd rushing sound which you of course must know full well."

"Ay—ay. And nothing else—no hoofbeat?"

"No, captain, nothing like that."

"Then we will not distress our horses any longer, but reserve them for a time of greater need."

"What is it you think of doing?"

"Entering the wood."

"Shall I mount again?"

"Yes, by all means. It will be time enough to walk when we are unable to advance on horseback."

Having thus spoken, Dick once more turned his mare's head towards the trees and rode slowly forward.

Tom Davis speedily followed.

For some time they were able to proceed with but little difficulty.

At last, however, the density of the vegetation compelled them to quit their saddles.

On the way, Dick had been considering somewhat attentively what should be the nature of his future proceedings.

Upon reflection, he considered that he had by no means got far enough from the scene of his late exploit to be very safe, and doubtless ere many hours elapsed a rigid search after him would be instituted.

By what means could he best hope to escape it?

Taking into account the vastness of the wood and the difficulty there must of necessity be in attempting to explore it thoroughly, he could not avoid coming to the conclusion that if he could only find something like a shelter from the open air he could not do better than remain where he was until the first fury of the pursuit should have been expended.

He then made his two companions acquainted with his thoughts, with the justness of which they both agreed.

For some time they continued to push on through the trees, Dick's object being to gain, if possible, about the middle of the wood.

Many were the obstacles they had to surmount, but having overcome them, they looked back upon each as an additional means of defence from their foes.

But suddenly an exclamation escaped Turpin's lips—an exclamation which was at once echoed by Maud.

Chance had directed their steps to one of those open spots so often to be met with in woods of great extent, where, from some cause or other, no lofty vegetation seemed able to flourish.

This open spot was not a glade, though it partook somewhat of that character.

Having been so long in the darkness among the thickly-growing trunks of the old trees, this open space, by contrast, was quite light, and they were able to distinguish every portion of it.

The object which had arrested Dick's attention was a small half-ruined hut, which apparently had been hastily built of the rudest materials.

"Behold," said Dick, pointing towards it, "there is such a shelter as we seek."

"But suppose it is inhabited?" suggested Maud.

"It has not that appearance," Dick responded. "But the point is one which we will quickly ascertain."

"Be careful!"

"I will, depend upon it. Come, there is, I feel assured, nothing to be afraid of."

Nevertheless, Dick took care to have his weapons in readiness for instant use.

A very few steps brought them to the threshold of the hut—though shed would, perhaps, be a more accurate denomination.

Dick pushed open the door hastily, and no sooner had he done so than his nose was assailed by a pungent smell of smoke coming seemingly from a smothered fire.

"There has been some one here recently, that is certain," Dick remarked. "However, we will venture to enter, for all that."

He was just about to cross the threshold when the sharp report of a fire-arm came upon his ears.

The sound caused him involuntarily to come to a standstill.

"What was that?" he said.

"A gun, I fancy," answered Tom Davis.

"Surely—surely," Maud cried, tremblingly, "they cannot have got so close behind us—"

"No—no," said Dick. "Banish that fear; the danger you apprehend is impossible."

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it, Tom?"

"Let us listen."

There was an anxious interval of silence.

"What do you hear, captain?"

"A footstep."

"So do I."

"It is approaching."

"There is no doubt of it. What shall we do?"

"Remain where we are, and abide the result. Only one person is coming, so we have nothing to dread."

In spite of the confident tone in which Dick pronounced these words, Maud suffered great anxiety.

The footstep came nearer and nearer, however, until at length a human form presented itself to their view.

So strange was the aspect of the intruder that all three of our friends gazed upon him with the utmost interest.

The new-comer, too, as was evident from his actions, was not a little astonished at beholding strangers in the vicinity of the hut.

He threw down some heavy object which he had been carrying, and immediately placed to his shoulder an old rusty firelock that he carried.

"Hold off, there!" he said, in a gruff, surly voice. "Who are you—what do you want?"

"Come forward," was Dick's response. "Lower your gun; we mean you no harm."

With some hesitation the man complied, and again resumed his burden.

As he came nearer he was seen with more distinctness.

He was clad in a strange mixture of ordinary clothing and the skin of deer rudely adapted to wearing purposes.

His face was scarcely to be distinguished, in consequence of the mass of hair with which it was overgrown.

The heavy object he carried proved to be a young fawn.

This, no doubt, explained the shot which they had heard.

"Willingly, master," he said, gruffly, but not as though disposed to be courteous. "What want you here?"

Dick looked at him closely for a moment, and answered:

"Shelter for ourselves and horses. If you furnish us with it and ask no questions we will reward you well."

"Such shelter as I have to offer you," was the reply, "you are welcome to, though I am astonished at the request. But, no matter, I am not inquisitive by nature. If you like to sup with me you are welcome to that too—ha, ha! quite welcome. You can eat as much of my lord's fat fawn here as you like. Ha, ha! quite welcome. Come in—come in. I damped the fire, but you will see a blaze in about a minute. Come in, I say; I don't often have company. Ha, ha!"

CHAPTER XLV.

RELATES THE PARTICULARS OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE.

For the present we leave Dick Turpin and his companions in their new quarters, as other incidents of a more startling character call for our attention.

We go back, then, to the time when the separation of the highwaymen took place.

Of course Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack quickly found themselves to be no longer the objects of the officers' pursuit.

Accordingly they reduced their speed to a leisurely pace which neither distressed themselves nor their horses.

The course taken by Claude Duval quickly took him away from his comrades, and when at length he reined in his steed he found himself completely alone.

"I can't say I meant this to be the case," he remarked to himself. "I hate to be alone, and I am quite sure I never enjoy an adventure so well as when I have my old comrade Sixteen-String Jack to share it with me."

Claude Duval pronounced these words in tones of deep regret, and, having done so, looked across the country.

"No, no," he muttered, "it is too late now. It would be ridiculous to attempt to overtake Jack now. He is far enough off by this time."

Consequently, very much against his will, Claude found himself completely alone.

"And a whole month to look forward to," he continued.

"A nice prospect that, is it not? Well, well, I suppose I must resign myself to it in the same way as I have had to

more than one disagreeable thing during my life. But, who knows, I may be fortunate enough to chance upon one of them ere long?"

It was perhaps in order that there should be some probability of the occurrence of this much-wished-for event that he slightly changed his course, keeping, as he judged, in a direction that would take him towards his friend.

Certainly there was never anyone less unsocial than Claude, and, consequently, as may be expected, he continued to give vent to many grumbings as he rode along.

His course for some time lay right across the open country, but at length he reached a point where the meadows were separated by a broad dusty high-road.

Upon reaching this point our old friend stopped for the double purpose of listening and deliberating how he should act, as at present he had formed no plan of operations in his mind whatever.

Not for long, however, did he remain thus in consideration, for no state of inactivity suited him for long together.

Riding along by the side of the hedge with which the meadow was defended from the road, he made his way to a five-barred gate that was a few yards distant.

To dismount, open this, and pass through, was, in his opinion, more agreeable than making a leap over a thorny hedge that was both taller and wider than is usual.

Accordingly he did so, and having gained the high-road, trotted swiftly down it.

"The hour is by no means late," he muttered, "and I may be lucky enough to meet with some one worth crying, 'Stand and deliver!' to. I may as well have all the fun I can while the chance remains to me, as the captain and Tom seem so strongly inclined to rest."

He smiled somewhat contemptuously at this idea, though then he little dreamed to what a disastrous train of circumstances this determination was destined to give rise.

It was just at this moment that the moon peeped out from behind a cloud, thus enabling him to form a much better idea of the nature of his surroundings than he had been able to do before.

The object which first attracted his attention was a large, handsome-looking mansion, which being situated upon the brow of a gently-sloping hill, formed a conspicuous feature in the landscape.

From some of the windows on the ground-floor of this mansion lights were gleaming, and Claude was at once impressed with the air of comfort and happiness which seemed to reign around.

Coming nearer he checked his horse's speed and gazed upon the building, for somehow there even came over him a strange yearning for rest and peace.

"How fortunate must be the lot of the dwellers in that abode," he muttered—"how calm and peaceful their existence—how free from the many hazards and dangers which are the accompaniments of such a career as mine! Yes, yes, I feel I cannot help envying their lot, for it is scarcely possible to conceive discord and misery existing in this fair scene."

This was a most unusual train of thought for the highwayman to indulge in, and for a moment or two he pursued it in silence.

Suddenly, however, the deep silence which had hitherto prevailed around was broken in upon by a low, deep sigh, that perhaps might be more correctly denominated a groan.

Claude started, and then his next act was to back his horse into the shadow.

Scarcely had he taken up a position close to a tall hedgerow than the sound of an approaching footstep reached the highwayman's attentive ears.

He watched eagerly, for already he felt a deep interest in this mansion, and the conviction somehow came over him that the sounds he had just heard were in some way or other connected with it.

He was not for long left in doubt upon this point.

The footstep became louder, and in another moment Claude caught sight of the figure of a young man.

He seemed to leap over a stile, then advancing up the road towards the spot where the highwayman was stationed, paused and gave utterance to a sigh of a character precisely similar to that which Claude had before heard.

It was a sound which indicated the existence of mental agony of no ordinary description.

Duval became more and more interested.

It seemed strange for one so young to be afflicted with so great a sorrow.

He was now within a pace or two of the spot where our friend was, whom he could certainly have seen had he once turned his gaze in that direction.

But he seemed to have eyes for one object, and but one alone.

That was the mansion on the hill.

"Alas!" he exclaimed aloud, little thinking that anyone was near enough to overhear his words—"alas! and must this be my last look—must I now say farewell for ever to those walls which contain all that is dear to me on earth? It is my fate, and I am wretched. Yet, if by some stratagem I could only obtain one parting interview, how much it would solace me in the future! But it is impossible—quite impossible."

The last words were scarcely distinguishable.

After a pause, however, he looked up.

"How peaceful the place seems!" he continued. "What an air of happiness is over all! To gaze upon it as I do now, who would for a moment imagine that a lone and aching heart is beneath that roof; and that, instead of kindness and affection, discord and tyranny reign there? But yet—yet—I cannot say the word farewell!"

It would perhaps be a task of no ordinary difficulty to make the reader sensible of the deep amount of interest with which Claude listened to these incoherent sentences, nor imagine how intensely curious he was to know something more of those mysteries which he felt certain were connected with that peaceful-looking dwelling.

Claude longed to address the stranger, but was unable to think of any satisfactory method of doing so.

At length the young man, having to some extent regained command over himself, exclaimed, in tolerably firm accents:

"Farewell—farewell! I will not say for ever, for even at this moment of deep dejection something whispers to my heart that I shall visit this spot again. For the present only, then, I say farewell!"

As he uttered the last word he turned round hastily and seemed as though he was about to quit the spot with as little delay as possible.

But in changing his position his gaze happened to fall on the forms of the highwayman and his steed.

"Ha!" he ejaculated. "Who is here?"

"A friend," was Claude's answer, as he advanced into the roadway.

The young man gave utterance to a bitter laugh.

"A friend!" he at length exclaimed, scornfully. "But—but why? I know you not—to the best of my knowledge I have never seen you before."

"I may say the same."

"And yet you proclaim yourself my friend."

"I do, and am willing to convince you of my sincerity if you will only give me the opportunity. I think I am not far wrong when I say you need a friend."

"I do—I do!"

"Then do not scruple to call upon me in any way you may think proper."

"But who are you?"

"That matters not. Be contented to know that I am what I first declared myself—a friend."

"But this sudden interest in one who is a perfect stranger—"

"Seems extraordinary, no doubt," interrupted Claude, "but it is nevertheless quite true."

The young man appeared to hesitate for a moment or so, and then, with some hesitation, he said:

"Give me some proof of your good faith."

"It seems strange for one so young to be so doubtful and suspicious."

"It may be," was the sadly-spoken answer, "but I have already paid dearly for over-confidence."

"Then you have been once betrayed?"

"I have, by the friend I trusted most."

"Well, then, if you cannot believe in my sincerity, why, I will just continue my journey, and leave you to do the same."

"Nay, nay!" cried the young man, placing a detaining grasp upon Claude's bridle. "I do not feel inclined to part with you thus."

"As you will. Odd as it may seem, I am at your service. In what way can I aid you? You are in trouble."

"Then you have heard my half-uttered thoughts?"

"Part of them."

"Well, well! Give me a moment to consider upon my course."

"Willingly."

The young man walked away a few steps, then paused, and seemed to fall into a fit of deep reflection.

For some time he continued thus.

At length, coming back, he extended his hand and said:

"I will trust you."

"Without seeking to know more than I choose to communicate about myself?"

"Yes."

"I am agreed," exclaimed Claude, grasping his hand warmly. "Now tell me why it is you feel so much reluctance to bid adieu to this spot. I ask not so much to satisfy my own curiosity, but in order that I may assist you with my advice, and with my strength of arm if necessary."

The young man looked at Claude's muscular form with admiration, and doubtless thought what a powerful ally he would make.

But he manifested considerable reluctance to commence his recital.

The hesitation was no more than natural.

After a pause he said:

"I know not why I should feel this strong inclination to confide in a stranger. It is foreign to my usual feelings, I assure you. But I will yield to my impulse and let you know my sad story in as few words as possible."

Claude prepared himself to listen attentively.

"You must know, then," began the young man, "that an unhappy passion is the cause of all my misery." *p*

"I guessed it."

"I loved and was beloved. I will not tire you by saying more. Our choice was approved of by the occupant of that lordly-looking dwelling, until disgrace—yes, disgrace fell upon our family; yet not through me—through no cause of mine. I was as innocent and unconscious of it as yourself. But my visits were forbidden. I was sternly told that my beloved could never link her destiny with mine, and I was threatened with many penalties if I even attempted to do so much as see her and speak to her again."

"But you did both?"

"Yes, in defiance of the prohibition. Agnes I found unchanged, and looking upon what had occurred as something for which I surely should not bear the blame and be so heavily punished. We met again and again, and I took a friend into my confidence."

"The one who betrayed you?"

"Yes; Agnes finding her father inexorable, and knowing by former experience that his obstinacy was so stubborn that no earthly consideration would induce him to change his resolution, made her choose rather to take the perilous step of flying with me than suffer herself to be doomed to a life of eternal wretchedness. All was arranged for the flight. The services of a trusty friend alone were needed. I told him all my plans; he promised me his aid; but at the moment when I was about to clasp Agnes in my arms there was a sudden alarm, and her father appeared before me."

"With much difficulty I escaped; and as for my friend, he flattered and fawned upon Mr. Glossin, and at length asked him to bestow Agnes's hand upon him."

"Great Heaven! until then I could not conceive such perfidy existed."

"Agnes, I felt, would remain true to her vows; but then she was unable to help herself, and so great is the terror her father inspires in her that she has no courage to oppose him."

"Since then she has been kept close prisoner, and all my efforts to gain another interview with her have failed."

"On his part he has done all in his power to push on this odious match, and to-morrow morning is the time fixed upon for the celebration of the ceremony. Finding myself foiled at every turn, I gave way to despair, and as I felt that I could not endure to be a witness to her being given to my treacherous friend, or even bear to be anywhere in the vicinity, I determined to bid the place farewell for ever."

"And do you think that a wise determination—such a determination as you ought to make?" asked Claude, who had been listening in attentive silence.

"I—I—I—"

"Do you not think that you ought to have made one more effort? You ought not to forget the maxim: 'While there is life there is hope.'"

"And you would bid me hope?"

"Certainly I would. She is not yet lost to you. It will be time enough to despair when she is, not before."

"You animate me with fresh courage," cried the young man, with sudden vehemence; "I feel as though I could dare—"

"Be calm—be calm! There is no occasion for rashness. Let us think the matter calmly over."

"I will think it over, but I cannot promise calmness."

"Well, such calmness as you can command."

"I will."

"In the first place, then, do you think that if you could gain access to her, and if you had the chance of speaking to her for a short time, and if you saw before you the chance of getting clear of the premises with her, do you think she would be willing to accompany you?"

"But," exclaimed the young man, half aghast, "how many 'ifs' are in the case!"

"Yes, yes, I know," returned Claude, somewhat impatiently, "but supposing such a condition of things to exist?"

"But why?—it is utterly impossible."

"You think so?"

"I am certain."

"You should never make too sure of anything. Answer my question: If there was the opportunity would she fly with you?"

"Most certainly."

"You speak confidently."

"I should not deserve her if I doubted her."

"Then I hope you will not be disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"Yes, for you shall have the opportunity."

"Then you have more than mortal powers."

Claude laughed.

"You never made a greater mistake."

"And yet by mere human aid do you mean to say you will accomplish what you say?"

"I am ready to give you proof of it."

"I am amazed I can scarcely believe that I am not dreaming."

"Take my word, then, that you are not, and let the adventures of to-night teach you never to despair in the future. You will find all the obstacles you speak of vanish like a wreath of snow."

"How—how? Tell me how?"

"Nay, that is my matter. Besides, we have no time to spare. You understand what I intend to do for you?"

"I think so."

"It is to afford you the opportunity of running off with your sweetheart if she is willing to accompany you."

"Do that," said the young man, "and I shall ever account myself your debtor."

"It shall be done, then. All I stipulate is that you must blindly and unhesitatingly obey my commands without stopping to ask why or wherefore. Do you promise this implicit obedience?"

"I do."

"That is well, for upon this will depend everything."

"But at least you will enlighten me a little further—you will not keep me completely in the dark?"

"You shall know all in good time; at present we have not a single second to waste."

"But—but—"

"Do you hesitate already?"

"No—no."

"Then take this riding-cloak of mine, wrap it closely round you, change hats with me, and make as much difference in your outward appearance as the means at hand will permit: your object is to disguise yourself."

"I understand you."

"Then follow me towards the house; I have much to think of by the way."

Fain would this young man have learned something of Claude's intentions, but he could see it would be useless to question him, and he was wise enough not to make this attempt.

In truth, Claude had much to arrange.

An idea had occurred to him as regarded a means by which he could accomplish what he had stated; but it was an idea merely, and required much elaboration.

He dismounted at the lodge-gates and left his steed in charge of the lodge-keeper.

This was a strange step for Claude to take, but then he had a motive for it.

The young man muffled himself in the cloak so well, and the change of hats had effected such an alteration, that he passed through the gates in company with his new-found friend without being recognised by the lodge-keeper.

As Claude strode up the well-kept avenue his thoughts were busy indeed.

But his fertile brain quickly enabled him to seize upon the most salient points of his design and reduce them to order.

Long before the front door of the mansion was gained his course was thoroughly determined upon.

From what the reader knows already of Claude Duval, he may feel certain that the highwayman had some further object in view than he allowed to appear.

What this was will in due time be made apparent.

Setting all other things aside, however, it certainly was a most daring act for Claude, with such a price as there was set upon his head, to venture to walk up to the front door of a gentleman's residence without attempting to alter his own character.

But audacity was one of the means he counted upon to obtain success by.

He had already obtained such information as would enable him to know how to act.

On reaching the front door, his first act was to knock loudly at it.

The hour was late, and perhaps that is the reason why so long a time elapsed before the summons was attended to.

Claude knocked a second time, but ere he could relax his fingers from the knocker the door was opened, and an aged domestic appeared.

He seemed rather confused by the darkness, and in a tremulous tone asked what was wanted.

"Will you be kind enough to tell your master that a gentleman who has ridden post haste from London desires to speak to him upon most urgent business?"

"But I cannot disturb him to-night—the hour is late."

"Is he in bed?"

"No, but he is about to retire."

"Then I must see him. Go, deliver the message I have given you."

"What name did you say?"

"I said none—because none is required; simply say what I told you."

The servant was not able to raise any further objection, and therefore retired to deliver the message, having first asked the two visitors to enter the hall.

The invitation was complied with and the door closed.

As soon as ever the old man had retreated a few paces, Claude whispered:

"Now, my young friend, I am going to endeavour to obtain you a licence to go all over this house without being questioned or molested. Do not stare so, I mean what I say."

But the young man continued to stare, for he began to think that he had been so unfortunate as to fall into the clutches of some cunning lunatic.

"You comprehend me? And now all I want of you is to remain patiently on the watch; and as soon as ever you see the opportunity to effect your purpose, embrace it. Hush, hush! You will soon hear more. Remain here and wait."

By this time the domestic returned.

"My master will see you," he said. "Please step this way."

Claude alone advanced, leaving the young man standing near the door with his mind in such a state of confusion and bewilderment as baffles all description.

How he was to act, or how he was to avail himself of the turn of circumstances he knew not.

But, nevertheless, he had the prudence to keep his face well muffled in the cloak, in order to avoid, if possible, the recognition of the old servant, to whom he was well known.

In the meanwhile, Claude had been conducted to a room, which, after tapping slightly, the servant opened.

Claude then found himself in a magnificently-furnished room.

Let the eyes turn whichever way they would, nothing but articles of the utmost value greeted them.

On the centre table was an elegant silver candelabra, in which two wax candles were burning.

The light from these fell upon the countenance of a man of middle age, whose brows seemed contracted by habitual stornness.

He looked frowningly and inquiringly upon Claude as he said:

"May I ask, sir, what is the nature of this business that you think is of so much urgency as to warrant you in disturbing me at this hour of the night?"

From what the young lover had communicated, Claude fully expected this mode of address, and had made up his mind how to reply to it.

"I am exceedingly sorry to disturb you," he said, making a low bow, "but, really, your lordship——"

"No, no—I am no lord."

"Indeed! Then I trust you will pardon my mistake, which you will the more readily forgive, because the beauty and magnificence of this place within and without are such as few lordly dwellings could boast of."

This was touching the proud man in a sensitive place.

His pride was flattered.

"Sit down—sit down," he said, "and let me know your business."

"Certainly. But you will not fail to perceive that the fact of my being ignorant of your rank——"

"Rank?" he interrupted, with a smile. "There is no rank in the case. I am just a simple squire, and no more."

"But you are a magistrate, I believe?"

"Yes—yes! But I am impatient."

"I will not detain you another moment. I come from the chief magistrate at Bow Street, Sir Walter Stanton, and, of course, you well know."

"But has he sent you to me?" asked the squire, in a flutter.

"Not specially to you," was Claude's reply, given with the gravity of a judge. "But you must be kind enough to listen to a brief explanation."

"Well, sir, proceed."

"Then, squire, of course you must have heard of the doings of that band of desperadoes headed by that celebrated highwayman, Dick Turpin?"

"Yes, I have heard. But what of them?"

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear sir—do not, I beg. But you must understand that there has been a great outcry made about the inability of the police force to capture these daring offenders, though they have made many attempts and have been the cause of a great deal of expense."

"Yes," said the squire, "I have heard many speak of this, and all have been unanimous in declaring these repeated failures to be a disgrace to the Government."

"Just so, squire," continued Claude, with much emphasis; "and that will probably account for a disclosure I have to make to you."

"What, about these wretches?"

"Do you mean the police officers?" asked Claude, with difficulty preserving his gravity.

"No, no, of course not—the highwaymen."

"Oh, pardon me—yes. Well, as I was saying, Sir Walter has at last taken this affair into his own hands, in consequence, I fancy,"—and here Claude sunk his voice to a low whisper—"of having received a very pressing communication from high quarters."

"Of what nature?"

"Respecting the inefficiency of the police, and I almost think with something more disagreeable beside. However, as I ought to have told you at first—though doubtless your own penetration has enabled you to guess it—I am the private agent of Sir Walter, the person he employs upon all affairs of secrecy and importance."

"Indeed, sir—is it so?"

"It is. I have the inexpressible honour of representing Sir Walter's person."

The squire bowed upon receipt of this intimation, and then said:

"May I ask to what cause I am indebted for your presence here this evening?"

As soon as the question was asked him, Claude glanced round the apartment with an air of well-affected mystery.

"Prepare yourself for a considerable surprise," he said, in a low voice; "but above all things retain your calmness—on no account make a movement."

The solemnity with which Claude spoke produced a due effect upon the magistrate, who waited in the utmost suspense to hear the disclosure which was about to be made.

"What is it?"

"Are you prepared for strange tidings?"

"Quite," was the answer, though the word was not pronounced with any particular amount of firmness.

"Well, then, squire, I have most certain and indubitable information that—now, be calm—that the celebrated Claude Duval is somewhere about your premises—as I believe, under your very roof."

In spite of his firmness, the squire started from his chair, aghast with surprise.

"My dear sir," continued Claude, "remember what I said to you—be calm!"

"Calm? Calm the devil! How on earth can a magistrate and a gentleman be calm when he knows such a ruffian as Claude Duval is in his house?"

"But, my dear sir, I assure you you will ruin all if you are in the least precipitate—indeed, I would not answer for your valuable life."

This speech moderated the squire somewhat.

Little did he think, however, what a double meaning lurked under every one of Claude's sentences.

"I must entreat you," said the highwayman, "to leave all to me—to do as Sir Walter has done—namely, put the conduct of this night's great business into my despatch."

"Well, sir—well?" said the squire, sinking into his chair again. "What would you say and do?"

"That which, I judge, will prove the best."

"Let me hear it."

"Believe me, I have taken my measures most effectually, and the result will be undoubtedly the rascal's capture."

"Explain—explain! Make haste! Do you not think you are wasting valuable time?"

"By no means, sir. There is no occasion for hurry—not the least in the world."

"Well, you know best."

"I trust, sir, you will put faith in my judgment."

"I will, willingly."

"Then let me assure you that I have watched Claude's every movement, and I at length tracked him here. He has no idea whatever of his danger; but yet I have managed to surround this dwelling in an unbroken circle, the boundary of which I feel confident he cannot pass at any point."

CHAPTER MLVI.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL CARRIES MATTERS TO EXTREMES.

"THEN, if that is the case," said the squire, "I should think you have been tolerably secure already."

"I should think so if any ordinary individual was in the case; but the many failures which have been made already serve as beacons to warn me against over-confidence."

"Just so—just so: you are right. Be good enough to let me into the light of your plans."

"I will do so; and I trust you will approve of them."

The squire inclined his head.

"My object, then, is," said Claude, in a confidential tone of voice, "just to scare this fellow out of his present quarters without letting him have any idea that he is menaced by such a danger as contact with a large body of officers. He will thus be taken by surprise. He will leave the house, and before he goes many yards will encounter the officers. An alarm will be instantly raised, so that escape will be utterly out of the question."

"Capital—capital!" cried the squire, in a transport of enthusiasm. "It would be impossible to devise anything better. It is sure to succeed."

"I am very glad you think so," said Claude, bowing, "though I confess I cannot help flattering myself that it

is a good scheme; and if it had been put into execution sooner the rascal would long since have ended his career at Tyburn."

Claude made a wry face as he pronounced the last ominous word.

Like Macnetti's "Amen!" it stuck in his throat.

But the squire was too much absorbed by what he had heard to pay any attention to so trifling a circumstance.

"I never knew anything half so good!" he cried, rubbing his hands together. "But now I have a favour to ask of you."

"Name it, sir—name it," said Claude, though his words were unavoidably tinged with surprise, for he could not imagine what on earth was coming next.

The squire drew his chair closer.

"You see," he said, "that this arrest and capture of the notorious highwayman will be a very great service rendered to the State, and therefore some sort of return ought to be made for it."

Claude, aided by the information he had obtained from the young man, guessed at once to what the squire was alluding.

"Well," he said, "the matter will all fall into my ordinary routine of business, and I shall get no more for it than perhaps a few words of commendation: rather aggravating, I must say, when I know very well that if the work had been performed by any other hand—say, by the activity of a magistrate of high standing, like yourself, for example, such a public service would be rewarded by the bestowal of a knighthood—perhaps, even, the rank of baronet might be conferred."

The squire's eyes glistened like those of some avaricious old miser upon the prospect of obtaining a large amount of gold.

Claude saw that his words had told.

The fact was, the whole and sole dream of this man was the obtaining of some degree of rank or other above that of squire, which he imagined but ill assorted with his social importance.

He grasped greedily at Claude's words.

"Do you really think so?"

"I might say I am sure of it."

"And Claude Duval, you say, is somewhere beneath that roof?"

"I believe I could make bold and certain enough to say he is."

"And—and," continued the squire, with increased excitement and agitation, "you think that if I assisted to capture him—if I took some active steps in the matter—I might anticipate such a return?"

"I do; though, at the same time, there is no occasion for you to put yourself out of the way in the slightest, or run the slightest possible amount of risk."

"And yet achieve the recompense?"

"Certainly."

"How—how? Be good enough to explain yourself?"

"I will, for I think there is a chance of our coming to an understanding with each other."

"An understanding?"

"Yes. Now, as I explained to you, this business will all be reckoned in along with my ordinary business. I shall have no particular recompense for it; but in drawing up my account of the case I could say—of course for a consideration—of what immense service Squire So-and-so was in the management of the affair, and that it is chiefly owing to his exertions and his sage counsel that success has been achieved."

"And you think that the insertion of something to that effect in your report would have the effect you mention?"

"I have little doubt of it."

The squire drew his chair much closer.

"What is the consideration you would require, now, for rendering such a service as that?"

"Whatever you might think it worth."

"Well, well, if I could make sure of it—I say, if I could make sure—I should not mind, say, five hundred pounds."

"It's a bargain, then," said Claude; "for if the result does not follow I will not claim a penny. That's fair, anyway."

"Quite fair; and to show that I am in earnest, and in order that you may have every encouragement to make

out your report well, I will give you one hundred on account—as a kind of earnest, you know.”

The squire opened a drawer in his writing-table, and took from it the amount he had just mentioned.

Claude pretended to feel some compunctions about receiving it, but it was forced upon him.

“Now, then, that’s settled.”

The squire, as he uttered the words, sank back in his chair complacently, for he already fancied himself a knight.

Claude coolly pocketed the coin.

“And now,” resumed the squire, after a pause, “I am most anxious to know what steps you are going to take to bring about a capture?”

“You shall not be kept a moment longer in suspense. I have no doubt, in the first place, that the rascal entered this house with the intention of robbing you.”

“Curse his impudence!”

“Do not be too angry with him. Think what effects will follow from it.”

“Yes—yes! Just so! And he is concealed somewhere?”

“Yes—hidden, no doubt.”

“How shall you proceed?”

“I will tell you. I have, outside in the hall—just by the front door—a very clever and faithful subordinate.”

“Well?”

“Yes—I call him ‘The Mole,’ because he is always so clever at working in the dark, and ferreting people out who are in concealment.”

“Yes, yes—I begin to understand.”

Claude now began to grow anxious, for he was about to approach the point he had been at so much pains to reach.

But he suffered no trace of his anxiety to display itself.

“What I want you to do is, to allow me to instruct the Mole to go all over the house, and pry into every corner of it. He will soon disturb Mr. Claude, and scare him off. But, mark me, it is important he should be alone. He is an odd fellow—cannot bear anyone to see him at work, and he will not brook the least interference; so I must ask you to give particular instructions to your servants to this effect, for I do not hesitate to assure you that upon Mole depends the entire success of the business we have in hand.”

This was another of Claude’s equivocal speeches, and he could not suppress a smile at the readiness with which the squire agreed with it.

“Then perhaps you would call and give the necessary instructions?”

The squire placed his hand upon the bell, and was about to ring, when some one tapped at the door.

Claude started, for this was an unexpected event, and he wanted to know what it meant.

“Come in!” cried the squire.

The door opened, and the old servant appeared upon the threshold.

It needed only one glance at the fellow’s countenance to let Claude know that he had made some important discovery, and was about to communicate it to his master.

What the discovery was, Claude guessed rightly, and he at once set about counteracting it.

He knew quite well, as if he had been told so, that the old man had recognised the young man in the hall, and was about to apprise his master of the discovery.

If he succeeded in his intent the whole affair would be ruined, which would have been serious to Claude, who was not half done with the pompous old squire yet.

“Master,” said the old man, “there is in the hall—close to the front door—”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Claude, boldly—“the squire knows all about it.”

The old man stared with amazement, and then managed to utter:

“But this young man, master—”

“Yes, yes!” interrupted Claude. “You see, squire,” he added, “that the interference has begun, and really, if Mole is crossed, I tremble for the result—the whole scheme will inevitably fall to the ground.”

“But—” interposed the old man again, vainly endeavouring to make himself heard and understood.

“My dear sir,” interrupted Claude again, purposely speaking in a loud tone, “will you allow me to give the necessary instructions to your servant? It is most important they should be attended to.”

“Yes, yes—by all means do so!”

“Now, listen to me,” began Claude, fixing his eyes sternly upon the old man. “The person in the hall you are to allow to go wherever he thinks proper about the premises, and you are on no account to follow him, to watch him, or interrupt or interfere with anything he may be doing, nor are you to allow anyone else on the premises to do so. Now, do you understand that?”

“Yes, sir; but—”

“Let us have no buts in the case—I am not in the habit of having my orders questioned. I believe I spoke quite clearly, squire, did I not?”

“Quite so—quite!”

“Then perhaps this fellow wishes for the satisfaction of hearing you say he is to carry into execution the orders I have just issued?”

“Yes,” said the squire. “Williams, mind you obey those orders to the letter, and don’t let us have any of your d-d officious interference!” he concluded, seeing that the old man was again about to speak.

Claude had purposely exalted his voice while speaking, so that every word should reach with distinctness the ears of the young lover, who listened with an amazement not to be conceived.

“I will just speak to him,” said Claude, as the old man was about to leave the room.

He advanced to the door as he spoke, and beckoned the young man to approach.

“The squire has given his permission for you to go all over the house at your pleasure, and has given orders that no one shall interfere with you in any way; so be off quickly! The sooner you get the business over the better.”

The young man nodded, to show that he comprehended the hidden meaning of Claude’s words, though he was so amazed at the extraordinary turn events had taken that he could not help thinking that he was being made the sport of some fantastic dream.

But his amazement and bewilderment were, if possible, excelled by the old man, who had not yet recovered from the shock.

But Claude held the door for him to retire, and closed it after him as speedily as possible.

“You heard your master’s orders,” said the young man, with a menacing gesture. “Beware how you attempt to disobey them in any particular!”

So saying, he bounded towards the staircase with rapid steps.

As for the old man, he was overwhelmed.

Throwing up his hands, he said:

“Well, well—who would have thought of this? I am either daft or else my master is clean, stark-staring mad!”

In the meanwhile, the young lover, with a fast-beating heart, ascended the noble staircase.

He knew full well in which chamber Agnes was secluded, and he made his way to it without delay.

He reached the door in safety, and having done so, all his strength appeared to forsake him.

He caught his breath in short and sudden gasps.

But he was conscious that time was passing—that such an opportunity as this could never occur again, and that every moment was precious.

This enabled him to summon up courage to knock.

The door was opened by Agnes herself, upon whom no further restraint had been placed than not being allowed to leave the house unless in company with some one.

Upon catching sight of her lover, she uttered a faint shriek, which would have been a louder one had he not, with admirable presence of mind, clasped her in his arms and stopped her breath with a fervent kiss.

“Hush—hush, my darling—do not make a sound!”

With some little trouble, Agnes disengaged herself.

“I—I thought it was my maid, Ada.”

“But you were wrong.”

“Oh, fly—fly, Herbert—do not linger here! I must not speak to you—indeed I must not!”

“But you must listen,” he said, grasping her wrist.



[DICK TURPIN ON THE LOOK-OUT AT STONEPENCE.]

"The time has come to show whether your love for me be real or visionary. The time has come for you to make your choice."

"What mean you?"

"You look but little like a bride," he went on, vehemently, without heeding her interruption. "There are even now traces of undried tears upon your cheeks—your eyes are red and swollen—your cheeks pale and haggard. Surely I may judge from this that you are not happy?"

"Happy?" she echoed in a tone of so much agony that it cut him to the heart.

"You do not seem as though you were anxious for to-morrow's ceremony."

"Oh, Herbert!" she exclaimed, with a outburst of tears—"why do you address me thus?"

"Because I want your decision."

"Decision?"

No. 228.—BLACK BESS.

"Yes—the way to escape lies open before you, if you like to avail yourself of it."

"Escape?"

"Yes. Why do you echo my words so strangely?"

"Oh, Herbert, I am nearly mad—almost distracted!"

"Tell me, then," said her lover—"will you embrace this present and unlooked-for opportunity to fly with me, and give me that power over you which no one can contravene; or will you remain here, and doom yourself to lifelong misery and degradation as the bride of a man you have assured me you detest, and who should be abhorred by all for his black treachery?"

"Hush—hush—you are mad with excitement! By what means came you here?"

"By a train of most extraordinary circumstances which I now cannot pause to relate. You shall hear all presently."

"But—but—"

"Take my word, Agnes, the way of escape lies open before us at the present moment, though how long it will remain so is very doubtful."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite—quite. Let me ask you once more, will you come—will you make me happy for the remainder of my existence, or render me the most wretched being on the face of the earth?"

But Agnes was greatly agitated.

The utterly unlooked-for appearance of her lover had taken her by surprise—so much so that she could not at once recover proper command over her mental faculties. Then she could not bring herself to believe in the reality of the statement he had made respecting the possibility of escape.

Herbert saw her excessive agitation, and with admirable presence of mind did all he could to abate it.

His efforts were crowned with more success than he had dared to anticipate.

He gave her a brief outline of what had occurred to him. But considering the agitated state of both, and that the young man himself was considerably in the dark, it may readily be believed that the narrative was excessively incoherent, if not incomprehensible.

"Once more, dear Agnes," he said, in calmer accents, "will you fly with me—will you be mine? You have no other means of securing your future happiness in this life if you love me as you say you do."

"Heaven knows, Herbert, I do love you!"

"Then come with me—come with me, I entreat you! Hesitate no longer."

"But by what means shall we escape?"

"The easiest in the world. Come down the staircase with me, and we will pass out of the front door."

"You are mad! It is an impossibility!"

"I tell you it is not; take my word for it our departure will not be hindered. Quick—quick, put on some outer garments, for the night air is very chill, and above all be speedy, or after all we may be intercepted and the chance lost."

Agnes appeared by this time fully to have made up her mind.

With great haste she assumed a bonnet and shawl.

Then, trembling with agitation, she took hold of her lover's arm.

All within the house was very still.

He led her to the staircase.

Again they paused to listen.

Then they descended.

Scarcely, however, had they reached half-way when the door of the room in which the squire sat, was opened.

Herbert's heart stood still.

He felt that the chance was gone.

Agnes felt as though she should faint.

"Courage, darling," Herbert whispered—"courage and silence! Perhaps even now all may yet be well."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL BRINGS HIS DROLL ADVENTURE TO A CONCLUSION.

LEAVING the lovers in this state of incertitude and fear, we will return to the apartment where we left Claude Duval and the worthy squire upon such apparent good terms with each other, and where events of a most interesting character were taking place.

"If there is one thing I hate," said Claude Duval, as he closed the door, "it is a meddling domestic who is not content to take orders as he receives them, but must, forsooth, stop to favour you with his own views upon the subject."

"It is indeed annoying," assented the squire; "but it is a kind of presumption which old servants often take upon themselves. But come, sit down, we have other matters to talk about just now."

"Yes, yes—very true."

"I suppose we shall soon hear an alarm?"

"No, I apprehend not. Mole does his work quietly. Moreover, I took upon myself to impress upon him very particularly that, above all things, he was not to allow any kind of a disturbance to take place beneath this roof. 'Now, Mole,' I said, 'one word is enough; the row must be all out of doors. It was consideration for the

different members of your honour's family that made me issue these commands,' Claude added.

The squire, of course, could not help confessing that he was vastly obliged.

"By-the-way," he said, "I have heard that this Claude Duval is a devilishly gentleman-like fellow—been a soldier, or something of that kind abroad, I have been told. I should uncommonly like to see the fellow."

"I think you are very likely to have your curiosity gratified."

"Egad, yes, I hope so! But you will excuse me for making the remark?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Well, then, I must say—going, of course, altogether upon report—that—that—"

"What?"

"That you bear no very distant resemblance to the individual in question."

Claude laughed loudly and heartily.

"A proof of your penetration, squire—a good proof of it! I do believe myself that this rascally Claude Duval has the impudence to bear some resemblance to me. That is one reason why I should be glad to have him tucked up, because it might be unpleasant to be taken for a highwayman under some circumstances."

"I should think so."

"Fortunately, I am well known, and therefore it is not likely to cause me any inconvenience. By-the-way, squire, talking of Claude Duval, I could tell you some extraordinary incidents in connection with him."

"No doubt. I have heard that he possesses an amount of audacity which it is hard to believe is possessed by any mortal person."

"Perhaps you would like to listen to his last exploit; though, I forget, perhaps it may already have reached your ears?"

"No—no; I should, above all things, like to hear an authentic account."

"Well, this is a most barefaced and impudent affair—most shameless, disgraceful trick."

"I am all impatience to hear the particulars of it."

"Then I will gratify you without further delay."

The squire prepared to listen attentively.

Claude began.

"I have been credibly informed," he said, "that this Claude Duval, by some most audacious means, succeeded one night in gaining admittance to a gentleman's mansion, as, for instance, this may be."

"Indeed! What were the means made use of?"

"Well, there I am by no means credibly informed, more than one version having reached me. However, it is certain that the rascal actually had the boldness not only to penetrate into the mansion, but also to gain a private interview with the occupant, a very worthy though somewhat gullible gentleman."

"But how did he contrive to obtain this interview? I can only judge by myself; I am quite certain he could never do it here."

"I should think not," assented Claude, with a hearty laugh. "He would hardly try it on with a magistrate."

"No—no."

"Still, Claude Duval is no ordinary freebooter, and must not be judged by any ordinary standard."

"I suppose not."

"It would be most unjust to do so."

"Well, well, proceed. You say that he succeeded in obtaining a private interview with a gentleman."

"Yes, the very owner and occupier of the mansion he was about to plunder: but of course there was nothing so vulgar in his case as an ordinary burglary."

It was now the squire's turn to laugh.

"I must confess," he said, "that I am unable to see these very fine differences."

"Very likely."

"But go on—pray go on with your tale."

"I will do so; I am glad it interests you."

"It does. But ought we not to hear something of—"

"Mole, I suppose you mean. Oh, you leave the business to him. I'll be bound it is all right."

"I will take your word."

"Well, to go on, I am told that before he had been talking long with the gentleman—who, I must tell you

had no more idea he was talking to a highwayman than you have—I say the interview had not lasted long before he actually gammoned some money out of his pocket."

"I suppose you mean Claude Duval gammoned some money out of the gentleman's pocket?"

"Just so—just so. I did not express myself very clearly. The amount was large, however."

"Pray continue."

"Well, the conversation went on very agreeably for some time longer, and then this highwayman asked the gentleman if he had heard Claude Duval's last trick—just as I might have asked you, you know."

"The fellow really did that?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then d—n his impudence!"

"How strange! That was the very remark I made when I first heard of it."

"It's very odd!"

"You will say so when you hear the conclusion of the adventure."

"Do not keep me in suspense any longer, then."

"I will not, depend upon it."

"Proceed."

"Well," continued our friend, "I must tell you, Claude got up without the gentleman having the remotest suspicion of who he was, and said that this last trick was the best that ever was heard of, and added he could show it much better than he could explain it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Claude got up just as I might get up now."

Claude suited the action to the word.

"Yes—yes."

"Well, now, squire, just for the fun of the thing, suppose yourself to be the gentleman I have been mentioning."

"The gullible gentleman?"

"Yes—precisely."

"And you?"

"Why, I—likewise, just for the fun of the thing—will personate the highwayman: you must imagine me to be the notorious Claude Duval himself."

"Indeed! Upon my word, I must say you look the character perfectly well."

"Ha, ha! Good! That's a capital joke! Only, if I had not so great a respect for you as I have, I might retort by saying just the same thing of yourself."

The squire, in spite of his determination to keep on good terms with his visitor, nevertheless looked annoyed at the freedom of this last speech.

But our old friend rattled on.

"You comprehend, squire, that for a time we have changed characters?"

"Yes; though what this is all to lead to I cannot think."

He spoke impatiently.

"I will not tantalise you any longer," Claude answered.

"In the first place, then, the rascally highwayman's words were something like these—as near like them as my memory will serve."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Something like this: 'Would you believe it, squire, this Claude Duval, as I am credibly informed, stood before the gentleman and asked the squire for his watch—just as I might ask you,' added our friend, stretching out his hand and taking hold of the tremendously thick gold chain which festooned over his dupe's waistcoat."

"But—but—" said the squire, grasping the chain as well.

"Excuse me," interrupted Claude—"just allow me for a moment—I merely want to show you."

The squire's watch was in his hand while he spoke.

He slipped it at once into his coat-pocket.

"Well," he continued, "this gullible gentleman looked rather blue upon seeing his watch disappear—just as you might now."

"But I don't understand you."

"You will in a moment though—you will see that the whole was an ingenious device upon Claude Duval's part to commit a robbery in a pleasant manner—without the least violence or noise, you know."

"Well, well, I suppose so; but I am anxious to reach the end of your tale."

"Your anxiety will not last many moments longer."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Well, Claude next took the gentleman's snuff-box—just as I might take yours now, you know—and slipped it into his coat-pocket after the watch, thus."

As our friend spoke the snuff-box disappeared.

"But I assure you, sir—" the squire began.

"Excuse me," cried Claude, drowning the squire's voice by speaking in loud tones, "I will not detain you a moment longer: I will just trouble you to lend me those rings a moment. There—thank you!"

The squire passively suffered himself to be despoiled of his rings, which immediately went to keep company with the other articles in Claude's pocket.

"Now for this diamond pin in your scarf. That's it."

"But do you mean to tell me, sir," said the squire, sitting very upright in his chair—"do you mean to tell me that the gentleman was so truly gullible as to sit still and allow his jewellery to be taken from him in this fashion?"

"I do assure you such was the case—just as you might sit now."

"Then I mean to say that he was a d—d fool! And now, Mr. Agent, or whatever you call yourself, be good enough to return me my things and finish your tale."

"Fair and softly, sir! I am already at the conclusion. I have only to tell you that the gentleman began to grow suspicious; and so Claude outs with a pistol, just as I might now."

"Now don't—don't! What do you want to point that thing at me for? Turn it away, can't you?"

"But I am showing you what Claude Duval did."

"D—n Claude Duval!"

"With all my heart! But, nevertheless, he pointed the pistol thus, and calmly requested the gentleman to hand him his purse and pocket-book in order that he might come to the end of the matter."

The squire now began to have some very serious doubts as to whether the matter was a jest or something serious.

But for the state of bewildered confusion he had been in ever since Claude's arrival, he might have been able to come to a correct conclusion upon the matter.

He thought, perhaps, that as the pistol continued pointed so menacingly towards him it would be best to look upon it as a joke.

It was therefore with an affectation of jocoseness that he handed over the articles for which our friend so audaciously asked.

"If the gentleman was gullible enough to do this," he said, "he was a fool, and deserved to lose what he parted with so readily."

"Squire, you have exactly hit upon my sentiments."

"But the comedy is played out now, I should hope?"

"Very nearly. However, you may as well hear the concluding scene, by which time I hope we shall hear something of Mole."

Claude really did wish this, as now, having succeeded in his designs so far, he was most anxious to know whether the young man had succeeded in getting clear of the house or not.

"I hope so, too," added the squire. "But go on."

"Well, then, just to finish, I must tell you that Claude Duval, having succeeded so far, blew the candles out—just as I blow out these—walked across the room, opened the door, passed out, and—"

While speaking these words the reader must understand that Claude accompanied each with its corresponding action.

He passed out of the door and closed it after him.

Of course what he said could no longer be heard then.

But a suppressed howl—apparently of remonstrance and discontent—reached him from the apartment. Claude rapidly turned the key in the lock, and then tapped upon the panel.

"Hullo!" said the squire, gruffly. "Have you done?"

"Yes," answered Claude, through the keyhole.

"Then come in, and let the candles be lighted. I'll be d—d if I don't think the joke has been carried a little too far!"

It was at this moment that Claude looked anxiously around, in the hope of catching sight of the young lovers.

His quick eye at once detected the two shrinking forms upon the staircase.

He made a rapid but unmistakable sign.

They both descended.

"This is my new and unknown friend," whispered the young man—"the one to whom I am solely indebted for my present happiness."

Just at this juncture the bell in the squire's room rang most furiously.

Probably by this time the conviction had settled upon his muddy-pated intellect that he had been most egregiously duped.

Finding that an immediate response to his summons was not given, he rushed across the apartment and thundered away at the door with both hands and feet in a most reckless and unmagisterial manner.

"Quick! quick!" said Claude.

Williams had left the hall in order to make his fellow-servants in the kitchen acquainted with what was going on up above.

He now made his appearance near the foot of the staircase; probably he came in answer to the vigorous peal upon the bell.

It is certain, however, that the first glance sufficed to give him a tolerably correct idea of the exact state of affairs.

In defiance, then, of the injunctions which had been so strictly laid upon him, he rushed forward and endeavoured to prevent the departure of his master's daughter and her lover.

But he was too late.

The hall door had been already opened, the broad perron descended, and by the time he had reached the threshold the fugitives were fast disappearing in the gloom.

He raised a loud outcry for the purpose of alarming the remainder of the inmates of the dwelling.

Just as he did so he heard a terrific crash.

Passion had lent the old squire momentary strength sufficient to enable him to burst open the door of the room in which he had been confined.

He rushed to the front door.

"After them," he cried—"after them! If you are speedy you will have them! Run—I will follow you!"

Williams scarcely waited to hear the remainder of this speech, but dashed down the steps with alarming swiftness.

Claude saw him coming, with the angry squire hard at his heels.

He could not help laughing at the ridiculous figure which both cut.

But he remembered that the young lovers were not yet free from the squire's premises, nor were they, so far as he could tell, provided with the means for making a rapid flight.

This reflection induced him to attempt to put a stop to the headlong course of Williams and the squire.

Accordingly, our friend ran on in the steps of the fugitives, but at such a pace that he felt sure the squire and his companion must inevitably overtake him.

"Quick—quick!" cried the squire. "Seize the villain—seize him! He has no end of my money and valuables about him!"

Williams redoubled his efforts, and shot somewhat ahead of his master.

Claude saw that the moment for putting his preconceived stratagem into execution had come.

"Not so fast, Mr. Williams," he remarked to himself.

As he spoke, he dropped with great suddenness upon his hands and knees.

Williams saw him, but was not able to check his speed.

His feet became entangled, and down he fell, shooting over Claude's body with great swiftness, and grazing the ground to a considerable distance.

The squire beheld the downfall of his dependant, but was not able to put any material check upon his speed.

Claude, however, who had obtained some slight injuries about the ribs, caused by the thick-soled boots Williams wore, rose to his feet.

The squire, rushing on, came full upon his servant as he was in the act of rising.

The consequence was that both lay sprawling on the gravel path in a moment.

A furious struggle ensued, caused by the haste both were in to rise, and this very haste for a time defeated its own object.

Leaving them thus, Claude hurried off in the direction of the lodge gates.

He was most anxious to recover possession of his horse, without which he felt his chances of safety would be very small.

Moreover, he was not able to see anything of the lovers.

Quite heedless of the havoc which he committed upon the various flower-beds that lay in his way, Claude directed his course in a perfectly straight line, thus saving much time, for the gravel path wound round in a very ostentatious manner.

He reached his destination in a very few minutes.

He was glad to see his gallant steed just where he had left it, with the gatekeeper standing near.

The latter was looking anxiously towards the house, from which direction loud, tumultuary sounds came upon his ears.

"Quick—quick!" said Claude, as he drew nearer.

"What is the matter, sir?"

"Matter? Why, the house is attacked by robbers! Run up as fast as you can; but open the gate first, as I am going to gallop off for assistance."

This, though startling, was probable, intelligence, and accordingly the gate was opened without demur.

Claude vaulted into the saddle with one bound, and was out in the road in a twinkling.

"Now," he cried, "run up to the house. Your master is furious at your absence."

With these words he galloped off, without waiting to see whether his commands were attended to or not.

But he went only a short distance, for he pulled up as soon as he was able in order to ascertain what had become of the young couple.

Riding slowly forward, he kept a vigilant look-out but without success.

Still he was unwilling to leave until he had seen them, once more and satisfied himself that they were in a fair way for safety.

All at once, however, he heard a shout, and immediately perceived the squire accompanied with several of his domestics.

They were all mounted, and carried with them an odd assortment of defensive weapons.

About such antagonists as these it is not likely Claude would have given himself much trouble; but, as ill luck would have it, another shout came to him from the rear, and before he could turn round to ascertain its source the report of a pistol followed.

"Officers!" ejaculated our friend, as he gave a hasty glance around him. "I must be off and leave the young people to their own resources. They may have got shelter by this time!"

This was scarcely likely, but it was more agreeable for Claude to think thus than otherwise.

When the pistol was discharged he was out of range, and now he immediately urged his horse to full gallop.

Claude began to fear that these officers might be induced by the magistrate to commence a search after the young people; and if so, they could scarcely escape it.

But the squire and his servants all called out:

"A robber—a robber!—a highwayman!"

"Claude Duval!" yelled one of the officers, as the troop dashed by. "I knew him at a glance, and wish I had been a little nearer when I fired."

Claude slightly reduced his speed.

"I will lead them to suppose that they stand a tolerably good chance of overtaking me, and that will decoy them from this place, and so give the lovers a better chance of securing their future happiness."

This was a very generous act for Claude to perform, for he ran no ordinary risk in thus playing with his foes.

The bait was snapped at greedily.

"His horse is blown," cried one. "Push on—push on, we are bound to have him!"

But after about half an hour's hard riding they had the inexpressible mortification of discovering that they had not gained on the object of their pursuit in the slightest degree.

"I think the farce has lasted long enough now," Claude muttered, as he looked behind him and saw that the officers' cattle seemed fearfully tired. "I will now shake them off and cause them to open their eyes a little bit. Here goes!"

With these words he spurred his horse slightly. The animal answered freely and readily to the incentive.

During this time the highwayman had, to use his own phrase, been "nursing" his steed, and consequently away it went at a prodigious rate.

The officers were so overcome with surprise that they were rendered speechless—indeed, motionless, for they only retained their seats mechanically.

A more aggravating occurrence than this could hardly be conceived after indulging so fondly in the belief that success would ere long crown their efforts.

But they instinctively felt that their hopes were frustrated this time, and we leave them to get over their disappointment in the best way they were able.

In the meanwhile, Claude Duval, having got quite clear from pursuit, began to wonder where he should take up his quarters so as to remain concealed during the day which was just about to dawn.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TOM KING MAKES SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HIS CONFIDANT. THE course of the narrative now reverts to the proceedings of Dick Turpin's two other companions on the night in question.

At the time of separation, Sixteen-String Jack had determined to rejoin Claude at the earliest moment possible, but this intention was prevented by the great speed made by the horse of the latter.

All at once, however, Jack heard a loud cry.

Turning round, he saw Tom King hastening towards him.

He at once checked his speed, and slightly altered his course, so as to allow his comrade to join him as speedily as possible.

They were already out of sight of the officers, who as we have already stated, had elected to pursue Dick Turpin.

"What is it, Tom," asked Jack, as soon as he was able to make his voice heard.

"Nothing particular, only as we got rid of the Philistines so easily I felt most reluctant to remain solitary, and so I thought you might be inclined to join with me."

"With all my heart, for I hate loneliness above all things."

"Where is Claude?"

"Galloped off, as though he had a score of his foes at his heels. Perhaps we shall meet with him presently, for he likes anybody's company better than his own."

"We are all alike in that respect, I think."

"Yes; let us ride on. Perhaps we shall catch sight of him ere long."

His hope was, however, destined to prove a fallacious one.

"Well, we will leave him to his own devices, Jack," said Tom, as he reined-in his steed.

"I suppose we can do nothing else."

"Nothing; and besides, it is a very long time indeed since we had an adventure together, so that if we do not separate there will be some novelty in that."

"I am quite willing to remain with you."

"Then, in the first place, let us make up our minds as to what we shall set about doing."

"What have you in your mind?"

"If you must know, I have been thinking of that treasure of which the captain spoke?"

"That which you frightened the officers out of."

"Just so."

"Well, what about it?"

"Why, it is necessary that we should get it moved to somewhere near to our appointed meeting-place, and as there is no knowing where we may be drifted to in the course of a week or so, I think it would be wisest to unearth it now."

"And proceed at once in the direction of Stonehenge?"

"Yes."

"I am inclined to be of the same opinion."

"Then let us waste no more time in discussion, but commence at once."

"With all my heart!"

This determination having been arrived at, the two highwaymen at once changed the direction in which they had been travelling, making their way back towards the Jolly Tar Inn.

"Are you sure you can find the place again, Tom?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, I took accurate note of it, and have no doubt I can ride to the spot at once."

"That is all right then. And now, Tom, my friend, I am most anxious to know what you really think about this project of leaving England for a time?"

"I approve of it."

"I fancied so. But how resolved the captain seems! It is odd to me if it is not Maud we have to thank for this alteration."

"Then you would rather stay?"

"Not to remain by myself; but still, personally, I do not feel inclined to adopt this course."

"Then believe me, Jack, it will be a wise thing for us all, and I hope ere long to be able to bring you to my way of thinking."

Jack shook his head.

"You may be incredulous now, but wait and see."

"I am reconciled to it, and shall remain so, because I think no harm can possibly come of it."

Little did Jack think then that he never made a greater mistake in his life.

"We have been successful for a long time," continued Tom King; "and as all things in existence must come to an end at some time or other, so must our good luck. Besides, a rest would be by no means disagreeable after the hurry and bustle we have had lately."

"Well, it may be so. But Tom, just tell me whether I am right in this supposition."

"What is it?"

"Why, I fancy you have some other reason for this than you have yet given anyone."

Tom was silent.

"Tell me now—am I right?"

"You are."

"Then what is this consideration? I felt convinced one existed of some kind or other. Let me know what it is, and it may have equal weight with me."

"I feel pretty certain it would not."

"Would not?"

"You seem surprised!"

"I am exceedingly so; and, what is more, I am very curious as well, and shall not rest satisfied until that curiosity is satisfied."

"Then, if that is the case," answered Tom, and forcing a laugh while he spoke, "I may as well tell you at once."

"Do so—pray do so!"

Tom hesitated a moment, and then, ashamed of displaying so much reluctance, acquainted his friend with his strange adventure with the hag, and repeated her prediction.

"And why have you not spoken of this before?"

"Because I felt a strong disinclination to do so. I fancied that I should be laughed at for being influenced by the impotent rage of an old woman."

"Then let me tell you I consider it in another light."

"You do not for a moment imagine that the prophecy will come true, do you? Dick Turpin is my best friend, and if I do not die until he deprives me of existence, I shall make sure of a good long life."

Jack was silent.

"What do you say?" asked his friend.

"Who? I? Why, if you must know, I would rather not say anything."

"Then that is equivalent to telling me that you place some dependence upon the prognostication?"

"You can think so if you like."

"But, Jack, I did not think that—that—"

"That what? Out with it!"

"That you were so superstitious."

"I knew that is what you would say. But I happen to remember very vividly something which appears to have slipped your recollection altogether."

"What is it? It is now my turn to feel curious."

"Can you not guess?"

"No."

"Well, then, I was thinking of the shadow on the wall!"

Jack shuddered as he pronounced the words.

He always did when the awful, mysterious, and seemingly supernatural event he had just mentioned was forcibly brought to his mind.

The recollection made Tom feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

"We are on a disagreeable topic now," he said—"let us change it."

"Just as you please. The subject is one I never care to talk about."

"Then cease."

"I will," muttered Jack to himself. "But I shall not forget the gipsy's prophecy for all that."

They rode on for some time in silence, nor, indeed, was a word spoken until Tom suddenly exclaimed:

"Here we are, my friend! And now, if you will dismount and lend me your assistance, we will quickly uncover the valuables."

Sixteen-String Jack looked well about him, and finding that, to all appearances, they had the place quite to themselves, he quitted the saddle and set to work.

The earth was soft, and was soon removed by means of their swords.

"It is only just below the surface," Tom remarked. And then immediately added: "Here it is!"

He pulled out the bundle as he spoke.

It was bulky, and they began to wonder how they should carry it.

"Let us divide the whole," said Tom. "We shall find room somehow or other, depend upon it."

The bundle was opened, and the glittering contents displayed to view.

Jack's eyes sparkled, and, without hesitation, he followed his comrade's example of filling all his pockets.

When this operation was brought to a conclusion, a considerable quantity remained; but this they disposed of by filling the small leather pouches which were under the flaps of their saddles.

Thus loaded, it would be by no means comfortable to travel, which made them still more determined to make their way to Stonehenge without further loss of time.

"There is one thing," remarked Jack, as they commenced their journey—"we shall be almost unknown to that part of the country, I should think."

"Yes, we can bear that in mind when we think upon our future proceedings."

"Forward, then."

The long journey they had before them was now commenced.

On the way, however, Sixteen-String Jack manifested great impatience, and his feelings with respect to the project for quitting England for a time underwent a complete alteration.

The gipsy's prophecy was continually uppermost in his mind; and though he could by no means see how it was likely to be fulfilled, yet he set about doing all he could to prevent the occurrence of such a catastrophe, thus strangely contradicting himself in his belief, as, if such was doomed to be the case, he knew full well no exertions of his could change the decrees of fate.

His manner did not fail to produce a deep impression upon Tom King, whose mind became overwhelmed with gloom.

Without confessing so much to each other, both felt that a calamity of no ordinary nature was impending over them.

CHAPTER XLIX.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A SIMILAR ADVENTURE ON THE COAST, AND MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A DEPARTURE FROM ENGLAND.

"THAT, then, is Stonehenge?"

The words were uttered by Sixteen-String Jack, as he came in sight of the picturesque ruins which bear this name.

The time was early morning, and the first rays of the rising sun glinted redly upon the masses of unhewn stones about the uses and origin of which so much diversity of opinion exists.

"And you have never been in this part of the country

before?" said Tom King, interrogatively, as he gazed upon the sublime scene before him.

"Never. Have you?"

"Many—many times."

"It's an odd thing, Tom, but you seem familiar with every place—you seem to know your way wherever you may chance to be."

"I had opportunities for travel when I was young," he answered, in a sad voice—"opportunities falling to the lot of very few."

"And you made good use of them."

"I did."

Sixteen-String Jack did not pursue the subject any further, for he knew how much it pained his friend to have the past brought vividly before him.

"It is a beautiful sight," continued Tom, still gazing at the ruins—"one which I have always much admired."

"And very lonely."

"Yes, exceedingly so. The chances are quite against our being disturbed by anyone."

"Forward, then, my friend! And I hope for the next twelve hours or so we shall be left in peace."

"Your hope is in a fair way of being fulfilled, I think," said Tom, as he directed his weary horse towards their destination.

Since taking their resolution, the highwaymen had by no means let the grass grow under their feet, while such was the caution they exercised that they felt tolerably certain they had left no track behind them.

The very secrecy which had attended all their movements deprived them of any unusual amount of interest.

They had been most careful to avoid adventures of every kind, in order that their presence in that part of the kingdom might be wholly unknown and unsuspected.

A few minutes enabled them to cross the open piece of ground which lay between them and the ruins.

When once here, the huge mass of stone-work served to conceal them completely.

"Years ago," said Tom, "there used to be the remains of a wooden hut, in which dwelt an old woman who used to obtain a livelihood by begging from the visitors to the place."

"And is she here now?"

"If she is, her age must be patriarchal, for at the time of which I speak her age was extreme, and her hut little more than a few old pieces of blackened timber roughly nailed together. But step this way, and we shall soon find out whether any such place now exists."

Sixteen-String Jack followed his comrade, and after threading a way among the huge stones they came to a remote spot where such a building as Tom had described was standing.

"The hut is here," he said, "but whether its inmate is we must find out."

There was not much difficulty about this.

The crazy door was swinging idly open, as though inviting them to enter.

Crossing the threshold, the highwaymen entered the hut, which the first glance showed to be completely empty.

"Some time has elapsed since it was inhabited, I fancy," said Jack.

"There is every appearance of it."

"Still, it will afford us shelter from the weather. And now, then, what is the first thing to be done?"

"To bury the treasure."

"What, here?"

"Yes, we can conceal it easily."

"As you like. I am quite tired of carrying so heavy a load about with me."

In fact, now Tom came to make a closer examination of these valuables, he found that they represented a much larger sum than he had previously imagined—so much more, in fact, that he was sure that this alone would be sufficient to warrant them in leaving England for a time.

Without any loss of time, this wealth was deposited in one corner of the wooden hut, and covered over with a small quantity of loose earth.

"Now for a rest," said Tom King; "and when night comes we can talk over what we are to do next."

Sixteen-String Jack willingly assented, for their journey had been a most fatiguing one.

But although both were weary and to all appearance in perfect safety, they did not neglect their general precaution of watching and sleeping alternately.

In this way the day passed without the occurrence of anything to disturb them.

When twilight was deepening, they held their consultation.

It did not last long, and the result of it was that they rode away from their new quarters, making their way towards the sea-coast.

They had determined to engage a vessel at the nearest point to take them across the channel, so that when the whole of the party arrived there should be no delay on this account.

By hard riding they reached the sea-coast before morning, though the dawning hour was close at hand.

The weather was rough, and a piercing wind blew obliquely from seaward.

The sky was covered over with one huge cloud, which effectually blotted out all traces of the moon and stars.

"What is to be done now, Tom?" asked Jack, with a shiver. "Do you know where you are?"

"I am slightly out in my reckoning, for the darkness has misled me."

"Where are we, then?"

"About a couple of miles from a small fishing village."

"And you think we can there obtain what we want?"

"Oh, there is no doubt about that!"

"How shall we reach it?"

"By making our way along the coast here to the right. The road is tolerably good, and we shall get there in little more than a quarter of an hour."

"Ah!" ejaculated Sixteen-String Jack. "What's that?"

"What—what?"

"Did you not see it?"

"I saw nothing."

"Look—look! There goes another! What is afloat, I wonder?"

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack pointed seaward, from which direction two bright lights had shot up, seemingly discharged from a rocket.

Tom King looked intently.

"That's a signal," he said, "and if we wait we shall see the conclusion of it. Ha! there it goes, you see!"

Another ball of fire shot upwards into the darkness, and when it burst and descended in blazing masses the effect was beautiful.

Scarcely had the last of these died away than our friends suddenly caught sight of a light burning steadily in the beach below them.

"See—see," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack. "What is the meaning of that?"

"The response to the signal."

"You seem to know all about it."

"I have had some experience. But keep still, I want to make out what is going on below."

By slightly changing their position, and by making good use of their powers of vision, our friends were able to distinguish a group of dark, rapidly-fitting figures.

By their motions it could be observed that they were one and all labouring under an excitement of no common character.

"What do you make them out to be?" asked Jack, at length.

"Let us draw a little closer—we shall be able to do so unperceived—and then I can tell better."

There was very little fear indeed that they would be detected, for the roaring of the wind among the cliffs and the rush of the breakers were terrific.

The path was rude and slippery, but it was traversed by the two highwaymen without accident.

Tom paused at a point some height above the level of the beach, and from which he was able to command a good view of all which he wished to take cognizance.

The group of people was now made out to be composed of rough-looking specimens of humanity of both sexes.

Their garments were soaked with the sea spray which dashed continually upon them, and of which they seemed to take no notice at all.

"They are smugglers, are they not, Tom?" said Jack, in his companion's ear.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it."

"And that is some vessel of theirs in the offing?"

"Yes, and on such a night as this it will be no easy task to keep the bark clear of the thousand tooth-like rocks with which these shores are studded. They have need of a good pilot."

"Which they have doubtless got. But you have some object in being thus attentive to their motions?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Why, I think these will be the very people to treat with to take us over to France."

"But can we trust them?"

"I should not let them know who we are."

"Yes; but remember how we were served when making a journey from the opposite coast."

"It is not likely that I should ever forget such a time of horror as that."

"And shall you run the risk again?"

"Not blindly."

"What do you mean?"

"Let us continue to watch the movements of these men, and we can afterwards be guided by circumstances."

To this Jack offered no objection.

The proceedings of the people below were not without interest, for they were all anxiously at work, signalling to those on board the bark to escape the rocks of which Tom King had spoken, and which were fearfully disastrous to any ship that might be unfortunate enough to get among their points.

At length the vessel out at sea could be dimly distinguished as a dark, rolling mass upon the surface of the almost as dark waters, which boiled and seethed like some huge cauldron.

As the bark drew nearer the excitement on the beach increased, and the utmost anxiety was manifested to bring her safe to shore.

"Here she comes!" cried Tom King, who had watched the whole of the proceedings with as much breathlessness as if he had been personally concerned in the venture.

"Here she comes! Now they have her!"

A grating sound followed as the ship, with one lumbering roll, pitched upon the sand.

"What is the next step, Tom? Mind, I place myself absolutely under your guidance in this matter; for, instead of growing lighter, as it should, it grows darker and darker every instant."

"Still the dawn cannot be far distant. But come, follow me—we will try whether it will not be worth while for them to purchase our silence respecting what we have just seen."

Jack understood this at once, and followed his companion down the rugged path with considerable confidence.

The distance to the spot where the vessel had been run ashore was by no means great; but owing to the inequalities of the ground, it took them some time to reach it.

So intent were the smugglers upon what they were about that it was not until our friends were actually among them that they became aware of their presence.

Immediately there was a cry of startled dismay, and our friends were near paying dearly for their temerity, as a voice cried:

"Spies—foes—foes! Down with them! Sweep them from the earth!"

"Hold!" cried Tom King, in a voice which was heard by all present, and the commanding tone of which instantly compelled every one instinctively to pause. "Hold, I say, and listen! Would you destroy your friends?"

The last word was repeated in incredulous accents by many lips.

"A light here—a light!" said the gruff, stern voice which had before spoken. "A light, I say! Let us see who these intruders and so-called friends may be."

A lantern was immediately produced and handed to a man of so Herculean a build that he seemed to stand at least a head and shoulders taller than his companions.

He came forward, grasping the light, which he held in such a manner as to cast all its beams upon the forms of the two highwaymen.

"Friends, are you?" he said. "Then how is it we do not happen to know you?"

"We mean to be friends," said Tom King, "and we have come here because we wish to secure your services in a little matter, for which we will reward you liberally."

"Well?"

"If you consent—and I give you credit for having too much good sense to refuse—I say, if you consent, we will both remain profoundly silent regarding all we have seen to-night, and lend you a hand to stow your goods away safely as well."

The smuggler captain paused, and looked intently upon our friends.

But they bore the scrutiny without flinching.

"You are no ordinary men," he said, at length; "and what is more, I don't believe you are traitors."

"We will give you leave to shoot us down like dogs if you see us show the least symptom of playing you false," said Tom King, with a bold, undaunted air.

"Give us your hands," said the captain. "We are short of men to-night, and badly want assistance to secure our goods. The weather is against us, and we have certain knowledge that a revenue cutter has been on the watch all night. I made sure at first that you belonged to them."

The smuggler captain did not trouble himself then to inquire any further about the services required of him, but at once set the highwaymen to work.

Our friends laboured with a will, and as soon as ever the remainder of the crew saw them at work, their apprehensions of betrayal vanished, for their unexpected assistants were now participants in their unlawful act.

By the manner in which the smuggler issued his commands, and the promptitude and accuracy with which they were obeyed, our friends easily came to the conclusion that they had all been for a considerable space of time engaged in this species of traffic.

In rather less than an hour the stranded vessel was completely relieved of her cargo, which was piled up upon the beach.

As soon as the last package had been delivered, there was an immediate commotion.

The cause of this soon manifested itself.

They were all most anxious to take advantage of the fast receding tide.

It was important that the lugger, for such the vessel was, should be got afloat, or else the locality of their secret store would be guessed at.

But the danger was imminent that, in spite of their efforts, the vessel would be left high and dry upon the beach, in which the keel had deeply imbedded itself, in consequence of the violence with which it had been driven ashore.

But this clearly was no fresh task.

Tom was afraid the attempt would be a failure; but all at once, with a rush, the lugger was fairly sent into the sea, where for a moment it rolled and tossed tremendously.

But the commander was skilful, and soon had his somewhat clumsy bark fairly under weigh.

The departure of the lugger was watched with much interest for some moments, and then all hands were set to work to remove the cargo.

It was while they were all thus engaged that a heavy booming sound came floating over the water, reaching the ears of every one, in spite of the tumult of the elements.

"Ten thousand curses!" said the smuggler captain. "That is the cutter! Quick—quick, my lads! Work now if you never worked before! It will be daylight directly, and there must not be a sign left to show that the run has been made here."

At this moment there was a flash of light to seaward, almost instantly followed by a dull report.

"They are calling to her to lay to," said the smuggler chief. "It does not concern us now. Attend only to the task that lies before you."

The men responded well, and by their united aid the packages and casks—for the cargo had consisted of both—were rolled to a small cavern in the cliffs, the entrance to which was so small, dark, and unpromising, that no one would have thought human beings would penetrate it.

Hitherto, the two highwaymen had not passed beneath this gloomy archway, the labour in which they had been engaged being that of carrying the packages across the beach.

This being at last completed, the captain said:

"Enter—enter. Fear not. The way is smooth enough, if you follow the rest."

"But our horses," said Tom King—"how shall we dispose of them? If we leave them where they now are, will they not be the means of directing special attention to this spot?"

"You are right," said the captain; and then he paused as if reflecting deeply.

"Will you trust me?" he said at length.

"Certainly."

"Then leave the horses to my care. I will be answerable for them."

"But we might need them upon some sudden emergency."

"If you do, I will undertake that they shall be close at hand. Will you be content with that assurance, for I cannot disclose all our secrets to a stranger?"

"Give us a moment to confer."

"Be quick, then. It is beginning to grow light, and it is most important that not a single being shall be seen about this spot."

Tom King drew his companion on one side.

"Do you feel inclined to trust this man?"

"Do you?"

"Frankly, then, I say yes. His gang and himself are to some extent in our power."

"But where will he take our horses?"

"Why, in all probability there is some other mode of entering their cavern at a point further inland, and this is where they will be taken."

"Ask him the question, and if he answers in the affirmative we will enter with him."

Tom did so at once.

"You have guessed rightly," answered the captain, in a subdued voice, as though he was anxious that what he said should not be overheard by his crew. "That is what I intended, though I cannot let you know where that other entrance is."

"We will trust you," said Tom King; "and we hope that will go a long way towards convincing you of our good faith."

The captain nodded his head, and urged them to enter.

He had little doubt of their sincerity, and with an amount of discernment for which he deserved due credit, he fancied the service he was required to do was one that would yield him a good pecuniary profit, although it might involve considerable personal danger.

Without hesitation, our two friends crept under the archway after the captain.

The darkness was profound.

For some distance they were compelled to proceed in a crouching position, but all at once they heard the captain say:

"Rise to your feet now and walk forward boldly. The path is clear."

It was no very easy or comfortable thing to walk along through pitch-like darkness, even after such an assurance as this.

The highwaymen were soon aided by a dim, twinkling light, on which they fixed their eyes.

Gradually this increased in size and brightness, until they found that it proceeded from an irregular opening in the rock.

Through this could be seen the interior of an extensive cavern.

Upon entering, our friends looked about them with great interest.

The only light there was came from a huge fire, which was burning brilliantly on the rocky floor of the cave.

The whole of the crew was engaged in stowing away the various articles they had brought to shore.

After the issue of a few necessary commands the captain invited our friends to a seat at a rude table near the fire, on which he had caused a bottle and glasses to be placed.

"Come," he said, "we will have one glass of *cognac* together, to drive the cold off our stomachs, and after that business, for I am very curious to learn the nature of the service you require me to perform. That's good, isn't it?" he added, after the glasses had been emptied.

"Capital!" answered the highwaymen, with tears in their eyes.

"The strongest brandy you ever tasted, is it not?"

"It is indeed."



[THE CAPTURE AT STONEHENGE.]

"Ah, there has been no doctor at work at that, making it palatable. But now, then, come—keep me no longer in suspense."

"What we want, then," said Tom King, "is the use of a boat, to convey a party of, let me see—yes, eight persons in all."

"And what else?"

"Nothing, except a few things we shall have with us; and a horse or two, perhaps."

"You would want the lugger?"

"Yes, and the crew as well."

"And where is your destination?"

"The coast of France."

"I thought so," said the captain, with a significant nod.

"The greatest secrecy will be required," continued Tom; "And if you are faithful, you will find it about as good a night's work as you have ever done."

do. 229.—BLACK BESS.

"What will you give to have the service faithfully performed, and without the asking of more questions than you may choose to answer?"

"How much do you want?"

"Nay, how much will you give?"

"A hundred guineas."

"Make it two hundred, and it's a bargain. I would take you then, no matter who you might be, or who was after you."

"Right—agreed! Though," Tom added, "please to understand that I do not apprehend a pursuit."

"Then I make the bargain. And now about the time—when?"

"That I cannot fix precisely; but certainly not for a fortnight to come."

"Good! But yet, let me have timely notice."

"I will, never fear. And now there is one thing more."

"Speak."

"We are to rejoin our friends not far distant from here; but they will not arrive at present. Now, should we require it, would you give us shelter here till then?"

"Most certainly. You are heartily welcome to make free with whatever the cave holds, for you did us good service by your aid to-night. If the rest had worked like you we should have finished an hour earlier. But no matter, all's well, and so there ought to be no grumbling."

So saying, the captain rose; and, having again impressed upon our friends that they were welcome, he moved off to superintend the movements of his crew.

"This has been easily managed," said Sixteen-String Jack. "And now all I wish is that Dick and the rest will speedily make their appearance, for I cannot help feeling that the sooner we are off the better."

"All in good time, Jack," was the reply. "We ought to be well satisfied with what we have done so far."

"I am—I am. But yet I feel a dreadful presentiment of coming ill."

"Dismiss it," said Tom. "It is caused by the thought that you are about to say farewell to adventures for awhile."

"I was never less in the humour for them in my life," answered Jack, in a tone of so much despondency that his comrade was quite surprised at it. "My heart is heavy, Tom, and I am heartily glad that you asked for and obtained permission from the captain for us to remain here."

"Nonsense," said Tom—"you will soon get over this."

But Sixteen-String Jack only shook his head.

CHAPTER MLX.

THE MEETING AT STONEHENGE.—THE CATASTROPHE.

THE hour was shortly after sunset, and the time about three weeks after the completion of the compact with the smuggler captain, as related in the last chapter, that three rather weary-looking travellers emerged from a small copse, and cautiously looked around them.

The view which they obtained from the spot whereon they stood was an extensive one, and long and earnest was the scrutiny bestowed on every object in the landscape.

"The coast seems quite clear, captain," said one of the travellers, at length.

"Yes, I think we can safely say all is well so far," was the reply. "Come, Maud, cheer up—we are close now to our destination."

Maud smiled faintly as she looked up into Dick Turpin's face.

There seemed to be traces of tears clinging to her long eyelashes, and her face looked pale and worn, as though the journey had told much upon her.

Dick witnessed the alteration, and sighed.

His heart reproached him strongly.

Her recollected what Maud had been until her unfortunate connection with himself, and he wished mentally for her sake that they had never met.

For his own part, he felt now that he would rather part with his own existence than with her.

Now, too, he could no longer blind himself to the fact that the never-ending fatigue and the ceaseless anxiety of mind inseparable from such a career as his were killing her by inches.

They were not without an effect upon the robust forms of himself and his comrades.

How much more severely, then, must they have been felt by one so delicately brought-up and nurtured as Maud had been?

All this had long been pressing upon Dick's mind, and accounted for the fact of his being in the vicinity of Stonehenge at least a week earlier than he had at first contemplated and intended.

What endeared Maud to Dick most, and made him still more anxious to gain a place of safety, was that throughout all their privations and sufferings no word of complaint had escaped her lips—she had not wounded him by the utterance of one reproach, nor would she have done so, as he knew full well, if she had died while in his companionship.

To be with him was all that she desired; and in order

to have this gratification secured to her, she needed no what hardships she was compelled to undergo.

"Cheer up," said Dick again, as soon as he could command his voice sufficiently for utterance, and placing his hand upon hers at the same moment—"cheer up, Maud. Let me once again see something like a look of happiness upon your pale face, for I assure you, on my word, that if we live, and no unforeseen events occur, forty-eight hours more is the longest time we shall be in England."

Maud pressed Dick's hand, for she could not trust herself to speak after receiving such an assurance.

Her throat swelled and ached until the pain was almost beyond endurance.

She shrank, too, from letting Dick know that the close realisation of that for which she had so long sighed and wished, was not productive of that amount of joyfulness which she had anticipated.

She felt that it was wrong upon her part to give way to such sensations as these, and she thought it would be a poor return to offer to Dick if she admitted that her strongly-expressed wishes were no better than idle whims.

Finding that she did not break the silence, and attributing her reticence to overjoyfulness, he said:

"Come, then, once more forward—a short half-hour will enable us to reach the place of rendezvous."

He gave Black Bess the rein as he pronounced the words, and the next moment they were all speeding to their destination.

No sooner were they beneath the shadow of the Druids' Stones than they heard voices and footsteps.

"Captain—captain," said some one, "is it you?"

"It is, Tom."

"Safe and sound?"

"Quite so."

While speaking, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack came forward.

They were much rejoiced to find that Dick and his two companions were quite safe, and this very circumstance went far towards dissipating that gloom which had settled upon Jack's spirits.

"Have you seen nothing of Claude?" was Turpin's next question.

"Nothing. But as he is well able to take care of himself, most likely he is all right."

"And you have met with no alarm here, Tom?"

"None whatever; and so far as we are able to tell, our presence in this part of the kingdom is a profound secret."

"So much the better. We have been most careful in all our movements, and I think I can safely say that no one has recognised us."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Tom; "and I hope the rest will furnish us with a similar account, for we have been here some time, and have effected some important arrangements."

Tom King then informed Dick of his meeting with the smugglers, and their undertaking to convey them in safety across the channel.

This communication greatly improved Maud's spirits, and a certain amount of cheerfulness was noticeable in her mien immediately.

"And have you remained all this while in the seclusion and inactivity of the smugglers' cave?"

"We have; but chiefly on Jack's account, who has suffered himself in a most extraordinary degree to be influenced by—"

Here Tom paused, as for the moment he forgot that he had not mentioned to those present his meeting with the old woman who had uttered the strange prophecy.

"By what, Tom? Why do you pause?"

"Because," interrupted Jack, "he does not care to let you know that he encountered an old woman who predicted that—that—"

"What?" asked Dick, impatiently. "Why do you hesitate and look so grave?"

"It is ridiculous for him to do so," said Tom King, interrupting in his turn, and speaking with as much levity as he could call up. "Because he is foolish enough to pay a deep regard to the impotent curses of an angry old woman."

"But what did she say?"

"The most improbable thing in the world, Dick—that which you would never guess if you tried for a month, it is so monstrous."

"I shall not make the attempt, then. But, as my curiosity is strongly excited, perhaps you will tell me without keeping me any longer in suspense."

"I will. She prophesied that my death was at hand, and that I was doomed to die at the hands of my best friend."

"Your best friend?" echoed Dick, in tones which showed how extreme was his surprise.

"Yes, such were the words."

"Then that must be—"

"No other than yourself, Dick. Nay, don't regard it. If I live till you, my longest, truest, staunchest friend, deprive me of life, I shall make sure of a long existence; or if the prophecy must be fulfilled, I would sooner take it from your hands than from the hangman's rope. But give us your hand—there, that's it!—and think no more about it!"

Tom King, as he spoke, grasped his old comrade's hand and shook it warmly.

Dick did not speak, but the communication he had just received made a very deep impression upon him.

Whether he would have made any remark upon recovering from the state of surprise into which he had been thrown is uncertain, for just at this moment some one was heard approaching.

Looking out, they saw that it was Claude Duval, who was riding slowly, and apparently in doubt as to what point of the ruins he should direct his course.

In a low voice, Dick called to him. He was afraid to hail him loudly lest there should be some lurker near.

Upon hearing the tones of that well-known voice, Claude rode briskly forward, and the next moment was surrounded and warmly greeted by his expectant friends.

"You are safe and sound, I see," remarked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Yes, all has gone well with me. I have had an odd adventure or two, which I will recount to you when I find an opportunity; and I do not come back empty-handed. Look at this."

Claude, as he spoke, produced from the pockets in his saddle a goodly quantity of valuables, and intimated that the pockets of his own apparel were equally well filled.

"You have been more successful in this respect than the rest of us," said Dick Turpin. "Still, as we have enough for our purpose, we ought to be satisfied. It is my intention to leave here for the coast as soon as Ellen and Mrs. Davis arrive, Tom and Jack having already made arrangements for the transport of ourselves and our horses."

"But why this haste?"

"You shall know in good time," said Sixteen-String Jack. "The matter now is finally settled."

"Well, you will not find that I shall quarrel with your determination, for I am so overcome with fatigue that I feel as though I should like to lie down and go to sleep, and not wake up for a month at least."

Claude's excellent spirits had the effect, to a considerable extent, of banishing the gloom which had been visible upon the countenances of all composing the group.

Nevertheless, he was quick-sighted enough to see there was something amiss, and at once became importunate to know what that something was.

"It is Sixteen-String Jack here, with his odd, superstitious fancies," said Tom King. "You know what he is, so think no more of it."

"Remember the shadow on the wall," said Jack, solemnly.

At the mention of this unaccountable event, all started, and paled slightly—that is, all but Tom King, and probably he would not have been an exception had he not guessed what his comrade was going to say, and prepared himself accordingly.

An ominous silence followed—a silence which Claude Duval was the first to break.

"Why do you recur to that circumstance?" he said.

"Because the remembrance of it ought to teach you not to think too lightly, of anything that happens to be beyond your comprehension," was Jack's answer.

"But why not tell me what it is that has since made such an impression upon you?"

Tom King, thinking the explanation would best come from him, related his adventure with the woman.

In spite of what Jack had said, it was plain that he (Tom) was determined to make light of it, or at any rate, appear to do so.

But in spite of the levity with which he spoke, Claude was considerably affected, and, strange as it may seem, his exuberant spirits subsided from that moment.

This, however, he was pleased to ascribe to the fatigue of which he had previously spoken.

He at once sought out a place of repose.

The accommodation was very limited in this respect, and on the present occasion Claude Duval was even less inclined than usual to be particular.

Thinking of what had just passed, kept sleep for a long time from his eyelids, and when at length he closed them in slumber, he was tormented by all manner of distracting visions.

As the reader may be sure, Maud was much affected, and at the first opportunity she had of speaking alone with Dick Turpin, she said:

"Tell me now, and tell me truly, what do you think of this strange occurrence?"

"I would rather not speak at all."

"But at least you will tell me whether you think the prophecy is likely ever to be fulfilled."

"In a word, then, I do not. I should not hesitate to characterise it as the most improbable thing to occur; still, it is not impossible."

"Not impossible?" echoed Maud, in some surprise at his words.

"No. But if Tom loses his life at my hands, it will only be through the occurrence of some most remarkable accident. Rest assured, it is a contingency which I shall ever do my best to be on my guard against; and now let discussion upon this profitless subject have an end; it can lead to no result."

CHAPTER MLXI.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES ARE GLADDENED BY THE APPEARANCE OF ELLEN AND MRS. DAVIS AT STONEHENGE.

Thus admonished, Maud relapsed into silence; but it was not likely she could help her thoughts brooding upon the matter.

One of the strangest things connected with it was the deep effect which the prophecy had upon all who heard it.

One might almost have fancied that it found an answering echo in all their hearts—that without being conscious of so doing, all had expected it.

Tom King was surprised at the manner in which his communication had been received by his companions, and it became very difficult indeed for him to maintain, when alone, that levity which he had not very easily assumed when in their presence.

During the night which ensued nothing occurred worthy of special mention.

To all appearances, they were as much in solitude on Salisbury Plain as they would have been upon some desolate, uninhabited island.

The highwaymen, one and all, congratulated themselves upon having found such isolated quarters.

For form's sake, their usual method of keeping watch was adhered to; but nothing occurred to break in upon the security of their position.

No sound was heard save the low baying of some distant sheep, which came upon the ear with a melancholy effect; it seemed to make the loneliness of their position more apparent.

The ensuing day was chiefly spent in wandering about the stupendous ruins, which then had not that marred, defaced appearance which they now present.

Sixteen-String Jack had had the prudence to bring with him from the smugglers' cavern a tolerably large supply of such provisions as he could lay his hands upon, with excellent wine in profusion.

On this score they had nothing to trouble them.

As soon as the sun began to decline towards the west, they commenced their look-out for Mrs. Davis and Ellen.

It was unanimously wished that they would speedily make their appearance.

The present seemed so favourable an opportunity of carrying out their design of leaving England, that it seemed a thousand pities not to avail themselves of it; for even at Stonehenge the highwaymen could not count upon remaining long in this state of seclusion.

"Understand me," Dick had said, "if they arrive at anything like an early hour to-night, we will at once bend our course to the sea-shore."

No demur whatever was raised to this proposition, which was looked upon as being fully agreed to.

Without separating much from each other, the highwaymen contrived to post themselves at various points of the ruins in such a manner that they were able to command every approach.

While they remained thus, they could not fail to be made cognisant at an early moment of the approach of those they looked for.

Thus they remained for some time, talking busily with each other; but as the subject was almost exclusively their project for leaving England, their conversation would be tedious to set down.

Night came at length.

The stars, one by one, peeped forth, and at length the moon rose in all her silver majesty.

Her beams, unobstructed by any intervening obstacle, lighted up the open plain around to a great distance, and the hoary stones themselves seemed to catch and reflect a portion of her argentine lustre.

But morning came at length, but without bringing those they wished to see.

Anxious and impatient, they passed the hours for the most part in uneasy slumber.

The perpetual suspense that they endured was hard indeed to bear, but there was no help for it, though this knowledge afforded them but a small amount of consolation.

It was not, indeed, until the third night—when all were sick and weary with long waiting—that their watching was rewarded.

Just at that time when the indistinctness of twilight merges into the obscurity of night Dick Turpin uttered a low sound, which had the effect of causing all the rest to come clustering round him.

"Hush—hush!" he said—"keep back! I think all is well. But still, let us keep, if we can, upon the safe side."

Tom Davis was with great difficulty restrained from rushing forward.

But Claude Duval twined his arms round him and held him fast.

"No—no," he said—"no you don't, Tom! Just keep quiet a bit, will you!"

"But I tell you they are approaching."

"Well, if they are, there can be no harm in waiting a moment or two in order to make sure."

"Sure!" echoed Tom. "Do you think that I could be in any doubt respecting those two forms which are so well known to me? No—no! you may be doubtful, but I am sure—quite sure!"

"It may be so," said Dick; "but still, the general safety requires that you and all the rest remain here in concealment. Who knows?—they may be watched. Be still, I say—your patience will not be put to trial for more than a moment longer."

With eager, expectant eyes, Tom Davis fixed his gaze upon the two dusky forms which could be seen approaching.

Despite the general gloom, it was quite certain that they were females.

One seemed much overcome with weariness, and at every few steps would pause and lean heavily for support upon her companion, whose slight figure seemed but ill adapted to sustain her weight.

For some time they came on in a direct line towards them, as though in no sort of doubt whatever as to their destination.

But as they drew nearer this confidence of demerit vanished, and irresolution succeeded.

"They will never find us if we do not disclose ourselves," whispered Tom Davis, in an agony of impatience, which made him regardless of what the captain had said.

This seemed only too probable; but Dick was somehow strangely impressed with the idea that there was great necessity for cautiousness.

Apparently there was nothing either visible or audible to account for this feeling.

At length, however, in a low tone of voice, he cried out:

"This way—this way! Ellen—Ellen! Hist! This way!"

A glad cry from the girl's lips let him know that he had been heard, though Dick was much annoyed at the want of caution which this evinced.

The sound reached also the ears of Mrs. Davis, who felt her exhausted strength suddenly return.

In another moment the dark black shadow of the Druid's Stones was reached.

Over the meeting we shall pass in silence, feeling sure that, knowing so much of all the characters as the reader does, it must be easier to imagine than describe it.

As soon as ever the first demonstrations of joy were over, Dick questioned Ellen.

"Have you had an uninterrupted journey hither?" he asked.

"Perfectly so."

"You have seen nothing of the officers?—you have no reason to suppose that any of our foes followed you from London?"

"I am almost certain not."

"How almost?"

"As certain as anyone could be who was not actually informed of the fact."

Dick drew a long breath of relief.

"Why, so far, then, all is well," said Tom King.

"Yes," added Sixteen-String Jack; "let us set about leaving at once."

"In good time. I see no reason for immediate haste; I would fain learn how matters stand in London. Doubtless Old Matthew has sent some message. Tell us," he added, turning to Ellen, "did you not meet with Old Matthew as soon as you were liberated?"

"No. But we were accosted by some one who said he was a friend of his, and promised to take us to him."

"And did he so?"

"Yes."

"And he found you a shelter?"

"Yes. We are both most grateful to him, and to you who prompted it."

"Never mind that now," interrupted Dick, hastily. "When you left, what did he tell you?"

"That we were to say that the officers were all uncommonly quiet, and that he did not half like it. He could not make out what this change of tactics meant, and felt much troubled concerning it."

"And was that all?"

"All, save that he had a piece of advice to offer you, which he hoped you would have the good sense not only to listen to but follow—those were his exact words," Ellen added.

"And what was this advice?"

"That you should all leave England at the very earliest moment possible, and not return to it for some time."

"Hurrah for Matthew's advice!" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Hush—hush!"

"What is it?"

"Nothing, only we ought not to be too noisy. Old Matthew's counsel shall not be disregarded even for a moment. I feel that this complete silence on the part of the officers is a bad sign for us, and as soon as you can get your horses ready we will start."

CHAPTER MLXII

ADVERTS TO THE ENERGETIC PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICE OFFICERS IN LONDON.

IN order that the calamitous events which followed the arrival of the highwaymen at Stonehenge may be fully understood, it will be necessary for us to devote a little space to the occurrences which had been taking place in London—to explain, in fact, that extraordinary lull on the part of the officers of justice which, as Old Matthew and Dick Turpin rightly thought, was no good sign.

In the first place, then, we must mention a singular coincidence.

It will be remembered that when Claude imposed so cleverly upon the credulous squire, he stated something

which he thought probable enough, but without knowing that such a thing had been done.

He passed himself off as an agent from the chief magistrate at Bow Street, and stated that certain high Government officials had sent an urgent communication respecting the many failures which had been made to capture the highwaymen.

Now, oddly enough, this was exactly what had taken place.

The numerous defeats which the police officers had met with, and the no better success which had attended the plan of patrolling the roads by dragoons, were felt to be a scandal and disgrace to the police officials.

The people at large, ever ready to find fault with the ruling powers, were loud in their complaints, and these complaints at length reached the ears of his Majesty's officers of State—or rather, the outcry became so loud, that they could no longer pretend to be ignorant of it.

Accordingly a particular message, of a private and confidential character, was sent to the chief magistrate at Bow Street respecting the matter in question.

The subject of this communication was, that he must make use of every means he could to capture the highwaymen, either dead or alive; and further added, that if this was not done after the elapsion of a reasonable time, he would be dismissed from office.

This was the most unpalatable and alarming part of the missive, but it was smoothed over by the addition that in the event of early success he might look forward to some lasting and substantial recognition of his services.

This hint was enough.

The magistrate felt he must bestir himself, for already he had remained at his post almost long enough to entitle him to a life pension should he be removed from it from any cause; so that dismissal, in his case, would have been excessively aggravating.

Upon receiving the communication the magistrate resolved to lose no time in taking promptly the strictest steps.

A conversation with his chief clerk resulted in an interview with a very singular individual, who rejoiced in the cognomen of Antrobus Skellum.

This man had led for some time a precarious life in making himself generally useful in police business, and in all that he undertook displayed so much sagacity and cunning that it was supposed he would prove the best agent for the capture of the celebrated highwaymen.

Until this moment the chief magistrate had never troubled himself to notice very particularly the exterior appearance of this man; but now, looking at him, he saw that he was a little under-sized fellow with a very wiry frame, and, probably, having not one ounce of superfluous flesh over his whole body.

His eyes were large and piercing, and the magistrate, who, from his very occupation, was no bad judge of human nature, felt at once that chance had supplied him with the very agent he required, and that if he failed to accomplish his purpose it would be strange indeed.

Skellum's eyes grew brighter than ever when he learned the cause for which he had been summoned before the magistrate.

"If you will only place power enough at my disposal, and give me a decent sum by way of a reward," he said, "I will undertake the capture of them all before a month from the present date."

"What power do you require?"

"As many police officers as I may judge necessary for my purpose, all of whom must be absolutely under my control, and who are to obey all my instructions faithfully and without demur."

"Granted," said the magistrate. "You shall have them. And now for the reward."

"That, your worship, I leave to you."

"Nay—nay: name your terms, and let the matter be settled now and for all."

Skellum paused for a moment in deep reflection, as though weighing his chances of making a good thing of the business in hand.

The magistrate grew impatient.

"Two guineas a week," said Skellum, at length, "for as long as either of us may live. No matter which dies, the payment ceases."

The magistrate stared, or he had not anticipated that a

reward would have been asked for in such a shape as this.

He held a whispered conference with his clerk, and took into account Skellum's age and the probable length of time he would live.

Last of all he thought that his pension depended upon this man's success, and that decided him.

He thought he could well afford to pay such a sum out of the amount to which he would be entitled.

"Agreed!" he said.

But Skellum was particular, and required a written memorandum of the agreement, in order that there might be no dispute in the future.

After some demur this was given, and an authority issued for him to pick out of the whole force such men as he thought would be most likely to perform efficiently the services he required of them.

Skellum began without delay.

To detail the whole of his proceedings would be somewhat tedious.

We shall give, instead, a general outline of his actions.

After much earnest deliberation and the abandonment of many plans which had suggested themselves to his quick-witted intellect, he remembered the fact of Mrs. Davis and Ellen being under sentence.

His next step was to ascertain when the term would expire, and found that he had not long to wait.

He then made a further stipulation, which was, that no active measures should be taken by anyone else in London against the highwaymen but himself.

This was the cause of that cessation of hostilities which had first surprised Old Matthew, and afterwards caused him to experience considerable alarm; for Skellum was so careful that he managed to preserve a complete secrecy as to his intentions.

The success he met with in this respect may be best understood and estimated when we say that Old Matthew was kept in the dark respecting his designs.

There was something, too, quite augurative of success in the calmness and patience with which he waited for the ripening of his plans.

It was suggestive of the manner in which a cat will keep on the watch for prey, with the certainty that if it only waits long enough its object will be achieved.

Thus matters went on until the morning when the prisoners were released from durance.

A trusty agent of Mr. Skellum's was placed on the watch at the outer gate.

He would have performed the service himself, only he feared that if he was seen there the cause of his presence would be suspected.

This man performed his part so well as to escape the notice of the person Old Matthew had sent, in pursuance of his agreement with the highwaymen, to meet the prisoners.

With the vigilance of a fox, Skellum's agent watched every movement made, and finally succeeded in tracking them all to the house which Old Matthew had provided for their reception.

This was done, too, without giving rise to the least alarm.

The house was situated in a small back street, and the spy took lodgings at a house immediately opposite, so as to remain perpetually on the watch.

At dusk he was joined by Skellum, who had been made acquainted with his whereabouts.

"You are sure they do not suspect that they have been watched and follow'd?"

"Quite sure."

Skellum rubbed his hands gleefully.

"All will be well now," he cried, exultantly. "It is nothing but fair and straightforward sailing now. No more is to be done save to keep a close watch upon the movements of those two females, and we shall come up with the whole gang at last."

The spy himself was sanguine of success, and as he had been offered a very considerable reward, he felt quite a warm interest in the affair.

But when a whole week elapsed without either Ellen or Mrs. Davis having gone abroad, doubts began to intrude themselves upon him.

He mentioned them, but Skellum only laughed.

"I am so sure in my own mind that what I have said

will come to pass, that I should have patience enough to remain for a month, or even longer, watching thus.

It was on the very next day after this that something occurred which would have had the effect of strengthening Skellum's convictions had they showed any signs of wavering.

This was that Old Matthew, under cover of the darkness, one night paid them a visit.

Our jovial friend had waited as he thought a sufficient time; and being, as we have said, in entire ignorance with regard to Mr. Skellum and his doings, conceived that he had waited long enough to make it safe for him to pay a visit.

"Keep good watch now," said Skellum, as soon as he was informed of this event—"keep good watch; for, rely upon it, the time is close at hand when the birds will take their flight, and we must be prepared to follow them with all secrecy."

This made the spy more watchful still, for he had the very highest opinion of Skellum's abilities.

But another week elapsed, and then Old Matthew paid another visit.

This was the period at which he told them that it was time for them to start, and gave them such information as would enable them to reach their destination.

The quiescence of the officers made him more and more uneasy, and occasioned him to send that message to Dick Turpin which the reader has already heard Ellen deliver.

He was most particular in enjoining secrecy; but, alas! how needlessly—all their efforts were of no avail, and he himself did not believe that the police officers were watching the premises.

Matthew himself provided them with funds for their journey, which, however, he recommended they should make on foot, as they had plenty of time before them, and by this means it would be more difficult to trace them.

Old Matthew then bade them farewell, and took his departure.

Skellum was now on the alert in good earnest.

He took every precaution which astuteness and an anxious desire of success could suggest.

Then he waited, and on the following night, happening to be at his spy's lodgings, he was rewarded by seeing the pair come forth.

With the same skill as before, Ellen and Mrs. Davis were followed; but though both turned continually and looked anxiously behind them, they had not the least suspicion that foes were on their track.

And thus they commenced their long and tedious journey.

In one respect, however, Skellum, with all his adroitness, was at fault.

When he saw them set out on foot, he had jumped to the conclusion that they had not far to journey.

He was not long in discovering his mistake, and wished he could hit upon some means of discovering their destination.

This he was compelled to abandon as impossible, for he gave them both credit for possessing sufficient good sense to preserve this a complete secret.

He again summoned patience to his aid, and of this commodity he possessed a tolerably good stock.

But he continued to lay his plans.

He strengthened his force, and sent to the chief magistrate accounts in which he expressed himself more sanguine than ever of success.

One person alone followed the fugitives, and as he went along he continued to leave accounts of his progress, so that the officers Skellum commanded had no difficulty in keeping in his footsteps, nor was there any necessity for the observance of secrecy on their part.

When he had gone far enough to form an idea of their course, he guessed their destination to be some point on the south-western coast.

"We shall have a good haul," he said, triumphantly, to himself—"we shall nail them just as they are about to make their escape from England. Ha! ha! my anxiety is as good as secure now; and, upon my word, I believe that I have earned it."

In this comfortable state of mind he continued the journey, though the slow progress they were compelled to make was excessively tiresome and trying to the patience of the men.

Whenever he fancied he discovered any symptom of

disaffection he painted, in glowing colours, the certainty there was that they would achieve success if they continued to remain true to his instructions.

He was afraid to remain far behind in the rear of his spy, for of course he could not tell how soon the fugitives might join the highwaymen, and he was desirous of pouncing upon them at unawares.

Thus matters went on, with little to vary the monotony which characterised them, except that each day their progress became slower and slower.

Mrs. Davis was excessively feeble, and Ellen by no means strong.

The reader will easily believe this when he remembers how much both had latterly gone through.

At last, however, Salisbury Plain was gained, and the knowledge that they were so near the appointed meeting-place reanimated the failing strength of both.

But the open character of the ground now made it most difficult for the spy to perform his duty unseen.

Still, by various stratagems, he continued to keep his prey in sight, until he beheld them enter Stonehenge.

Then he paused, and finally retraced his steps to a little distance.

Here he waited for the arrival of the troop.

"Ha," said Skellum, in whom this intelligence had produced an excellent flow of spirits, "now I have it! This will prove the meeting-place for all the gang, which I know to have been dispersed! If we are careful we shall have them all at one swoop!"

Skellum was amply provided with men, and he set about taking his measures with great rapidity and prudence.

He seemed to grasp at the capabilities of the place at once.

He was most particular to enjoin stealthfulness on the part of his men, who were able to make their way over the soft turf almost unheard.

Having first of all seen them posted round the ruins in a circle, with the men at such distances that they could communicate readily with each other, he proceeded to visit them one by one, and ascertain that their weapons were in perfect order.

He also gave them their instructions one after the other, so that there should be no fear of a misunderstanding.

The course he had decided upon to capture our friends was fearfully well calculated to answer the end in view.

Having placed his men round the ruins as we have described, he told them to be in readiness to advance slowly and steadily, and, as near as possible, all at the same rate of speed.

The consequence of this was that as they thus advanced the circle became less and less, and by consequence the men got closer to each other, until they were ere long shoulder to shoulder.

So silently had all their movements up to this moment taken place that the highwaymen were entirely unaware of their proximity.

The police officers listened.

They heard sounds which convinced them that those they sought were close at hand.

"Now a sudden rush," said Skellum, "and the business will be done—we shall be upon them before they know what is the matter! Be, every one of you, ready to make the best use of your powers during the next few moments! All is ready! Forward—forward! Down with them all! Remember, dead or alive! In either case the reward is just the same! Forward—forward!"

CHAPTER XLXII

THE RESULT OF THE POLICE OFFICERS' ATTACK UPON DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS AT STONEHENGE.

THE reader now will have no difficulty in thoroughly comprehending the tremendous nature of the peril with which the highwaymen and their friends were threatened.

So well generated had the police officers been that they were all in utter ignorance of their proximity.

One or two causes conspired to produce this result.

In the first place there was the general excitement which took place on the arrival of Ellen and Mrs. Davis, and during which they had omitted to make use of their customary caution.

A gusty wind, too, had blown up, which every moment increased in intensity, and the odd whistling sound which it made in searching a passage through the crevices of the old stones was sufficient to submerge any slight occasional sound.

Moreover, this wind had brought with it some dense masses of black cloud, which went driving across the heavens, threatening every moment to discharge a torrent of rain upon the earth below.

The elements, therefore, went very far to favour the officers.

It was, however, just before the police officers made their onslaught, that Dick Turpin uttered those words which will be found at the close of a preceding chapter.

As there was a unanimous desire to quit the ruins, preparations were instantly commenced for a departure.

Tom Davis, Claude, Jack, and Tom King started off to fetch the horses; and this was the time that they first became aware of their peril.

"Danger—danger!" cried Tom King, at the top of his voice, and preparing himself for an immediate defence. "The foe is upon us! The ruins are alive with officers!"

The concluding words had scarcely passed his lips before the whole troop rushed into the small open space where the conference of our friends had taken place.

Some remained mounted, while others were on foot, so as to be in readiness to attack in every way.

So suddenly did this irruption of the officers take place—so utterly unexpected was any such event, that our friends were completely paralysed by surprise.

Even Dick Turpin, accustomed as he was to sudden surprises of every description, stood as though he had been suddenly converted into stone.

True to the bloodthirsty hint which had been given them, the officers discharged their pistols; but they were too hasty and too excited for the volley to produce as much harm as one would have anticipated from it.

After this all was confusion.

Had there been a disinterested spectator of the scene, he would have been conscious of nothing save the clash of weapons, loud yells, groans, and cries, and the discharge of firearms.

Mingled with all this could be heard the trampling of horses, the rushing of many feet, and general uproar and confusion, while the gloom which prevailed was trebly increased by the smoke from the exploded weapons, which hovered over the combatants like a mimic crowd.

Dick Turpin's surprise, however, lasted only until the first pistol shot fell upon his ear.

That well-known and familiar sound brought him to himself.

In the twinkling of an eye he was ready for action.

But, to his dismay and horror, a wild and awful shriek thrilled from the lips of Maud; and after a frantic effort to save herself by grasping at Dick's apparel, she fell heavily to the ground.

Such an event as this was sure to have one of two effects upon Turpin.

It would either render him motionless or helpless, or else endue him with the rage and vigour of a dozen men.

Fortunately, it was the latter effect which was produced upon him.

In fact, it may be questioned whether he instantly comprehended to the full extent what had happened.

Be it how it may, he bestrode Maud's prostrate body, and, levelling the two pistols which he held full at the forms of the officers who were in the act of rushing upon him, discharged them.

Both bullets told, for, despite his tremendous agitation, Dick's nerves were steady.

Without pausing, he flung the two useless weapons at his foes with the full strength of his arms.

His next act was to stoop and raise Maud.

Supernatural strength seemed to be afforded him, for he lifted her up with as much ease and swiftness as he could have done a little child.

Then, having nothing before him but Maud's peril he made a rush to escape.

But it was scarcely possible he could succeed in getting clear of so many foes.

But fortune favoured him.

Close beside him was his own gallant mare, Black Bess, standing calm and unhurt amid the tumult.

Never had she rendered her owner a greater or more highly-prized service than by being at hand at that juncture.

The rapidity which characterised all Dick's movements now was something marvellous.

In a second, with a continuation of the preternatural strength with which he had been endowed, he placed Maud across the back of Black Bess, and sprang into the saddle behind her himself.

But rapid as he had been, yet the time had been sufficient to enable his foes to be busy; and just when he had accomplished thus much, our hero found his further progress opposed.

But he was then more like a madman than a sane being, and bent only on one thing—namely, a frenzied desire to escape.

He drew his sword, and flashed it round him with so much vigour and with such lightning-like rapidity, that his foes scattered before him like chaff, and shrunk from him as from a demon.

"On, Bess!" he cried. "On—on, old lass! If ever you strove for your master, strive now!"

Black Bess seemed not only to hear his voice, but also to comprehend the purport of the very words her rider uttered.

She reared and plunged as though driven to madness.

Turpin's foes shrank from her iron-bound hoofs.

But the struggle was only for a space of time so brief that we are unable to find a word to characterise it, though to Dick it seemed an age.

With one bound Bess cleared herself from the police officers—another took her beyond the precincts of the ruins.

Never before had she taken such furious leaps.

Nothing could withstand them.

Away—away she flew.

Shots were fired from the rear, but Dick heeded them not.

Other officers spurred their steeds unmercifully—steeds which had been expressly chosen by Skellum for their more than ordinary powers of swiftness and endurance.

On they came, till the earth seemed to shake and resound beneath the furious beat of the iron hoofs.

But of this also Dick was supremely heedless.

He laughed to scorn their puny efforts, for Black Bess was bounding over Salisbury Plain with the swiftness of an antelope which finds itself hard pressed by the hunters.

As though utterly unconscious of the double burden which she carried, she kept up that long stretching gallop for which she was so remarkable.

Away—away, until in the distance can be seen the boundary of the huge plain they are traversing with such rapid flight, and until the police officers are far behind.

But yet the gallant animal relaxed not her speed, seeming rather to possess some portion of the frenzy with which her rider's heart and brain were filled.

But we must leave them thus for awhile, and return to the scene of action, where much had taken place to which attention must be given.

We shall have to treat of these occurrences successively; but of course the reader will understand that this is compulsory, though the events themselves occurred simultaneously.

When they made their first sudden dash, the police officers succeeded in seizing four persons, or rather five, for they grasped Claude, but he, by a rapid, ready movement, and by a powerful exertion of his enormous strength, contrived to get free and stand upon his defensive.

The other four were not so fortunate.

These were Tom Davis, his wife, Ellen, and Sixteen-String Jack respectively.

The three first made very little, if any, resistance, and were immediately dragged away, Tom Davis himself having received a pistol shot.

As for Sixteen-String Jack himself, he was thrown into a complete state of paralysis, caused by intense surprise.

Nothing could possibly have astonished him more than

for the officers thus to spring upon them, and for some moments he was literally bereft of motion.

He only stood and stared around him, and, indeed, exhibited all those signs of semi-consciousness which sometimes follow a heavy blow.

He could scarcely believe that his eyes were serving him aright.

When he recovered himself from this state of mental stupor, which in reality had not lasted half so long as he had imagined, he found himself standing calmly with a police officer on each side of him, the vice-like character of whose grasp was far from pleasant.

The officers were in no slight degree amazed by the apathy of their prisoner.

His demeanour was so different to what they had expected that they scarcely knew what to make of it.

The instant he recovered himself, Jack made a sudden effort to release himself.

But it was in vain.

He discovered, first of all, that his wrists had been securely handcuffed behind his back, which made anything like an effectual struggle out of the question.

A dull sensation of aching pain somewhere in the neighbourhood of his ankle joint made him sensible that he had been injured in that quarter.

By the pain, he fancied it must be from a pistol bullet.

Both the officers by whom he was held had their drawn swords in their right hands, and they at once presented their points menacingly at the breast of their prisoner, while they said, in tones which admitted no doubt of their sincerity:

"If you offer any resistance we will make short of the matter by plunging these swords into your heart, for our orders are to take you dead or alive—it matters not which!"

Upon hearing these words, Jack gave himself up for lost.

At any rate, it would have been a mere act of suicide to have offered any further resistance then.

"I surrender," he said calmly. "I cannot help myself."

"Spoken like a sensible man, who knows how to give in handsomely when he is beaten."

To this maxim the highwayman made no comment.

His brow was contracted, and his breath came thick and fast as he gazed upon the scene of carnage going on before him.

But it is to be hoped that this resignation to his fate was seeming only, and that the expression of his unconditional surrender was only made in the hope that his captors might be to some extent thrown off their guard by it, and so afford him a chance of making a rush for freedom.

But in good earnest, Sixteen-String Jack's heart was very, very heavy.

For a long time he had been dimly conscious of what was going to happen, and this had manifested itself in the strong desire which he had shown to leave England with all haste.

Now this disastrous attack seemed to have crushed him utterly, and he hung his chin upon his breast with an air of dejection that was painful indeed to witness.

But aid was near, although he knew it not.

Tom King and Claude Duval had been the most self-possessed of the whole group, and had been the first to make a decided stand against the multitude of foes who pounced upon them.

Back to back they placed themselves, overcoming all opposition, and escaping by a miracle any serious injury from that storm of bullets that hailed around them, though several slight injuries had been received by both.

It was in vain—nay, it was madness for them to combat with so many.

But they had the satisfaction of witnessing Dick's escape, and they both hoped that Maud's hurt was not a severe one.

The real object of their attention was Sixteen-String Jack.

Towards him they fought their way.

They wondered much to see him standing still so quietly, and still more that he had suffered himself to be made prisoner so easily.

Their intention was to rescue him.

No sooner did Jack see them, and guess their intention, than he cried, in a loud voice:

"Desist--desist! Your attempt is madness! Leave me!"

"Never!" said Claude; and as he pronounced the word, he cut down the officer who had opposed himself to him.

"I tell you it is more than madness!" vociferated Sixteen-String Jack, in return. "You cannot contend successfully with so many; you must be defeated! Leave me—you cannot help me!"

"Never!" cried Tom King, fighting desperately.

"Then you are giving yourselves up and doing me no service. If you escape and join the captain, all will be well."

"Never, without you, Jack!"

"But do you not understand," cried Jack, almost frantic, "that while you are at liberty you have the chance of assisting me? If you are captured or slain you will require assistance yourselves; and where will you get it? Not another word, I say! Fly—fly!"

"Jack is right," said Tom King, in a tone of vexation.

"We can help him best by deserting him."

"A bold charge, then!" cried Claude. On—on! We must have our horses!"

But the officers, now under the generalship of Skellum, had formed themselves into a collected force.

They were prepared to bear down upon the remainder of the band.

But Claude and Tom both felt that they were fighting not only for themselves, but for their companions, and this knowledge impelled them to enact prodigies of valour.

As the last words were pronounced they made a sudden dash and managed to get clear of those of their foes who immediately surrounded them.

Then, summoning up all their powers of speed, they dashed among the ruins, the intricacies of which enabled them to baffle their enemies considerably.

Before them were some horses belonging to those police officers who had dismounted.

Panting and breathless, the two friends reached them.

They flung away their swords, for the weapons now would only have been an incumbrance.

Then, amid another shower of bullets, they sprang into the saddles.

"Away—away!" said Tom King, faintly. "We must part, and that will distract them. Away—away!"

The last word was scarcely audible, for Tom had been badly hit by one of the bullets in the last discharge of firearms.

CHAPTER MLXIV.

DESCRIBES THE PRECAUTIONS SKELLUM TOOK TO CONVEY HIS PRISONERS IN SAFETY TO NEWGATE.

WE feel it necessary to remind the reader that all which we have described at such length actually occurred in an extraordinarily brief space of time.

So brief, indeed—so rapid had been all the varied events, that from the moment when the officers first dashed in up to the time when Claude and Tom King got away, certainly not more than three minutes had elapsed.

To those we have just mentioned the lapse of time by no means appeared to be so great.

The whole seemed to them like an electric shock.

As the whole party of the highwaymen and their friends had been thus suddenly separated, it will be necessary for us to describe sequentially what befel them.

Assuming, then, that for the present at any rate, Sixteen-String Jack's position to be the most critical, we will first of all give our consideration to him.

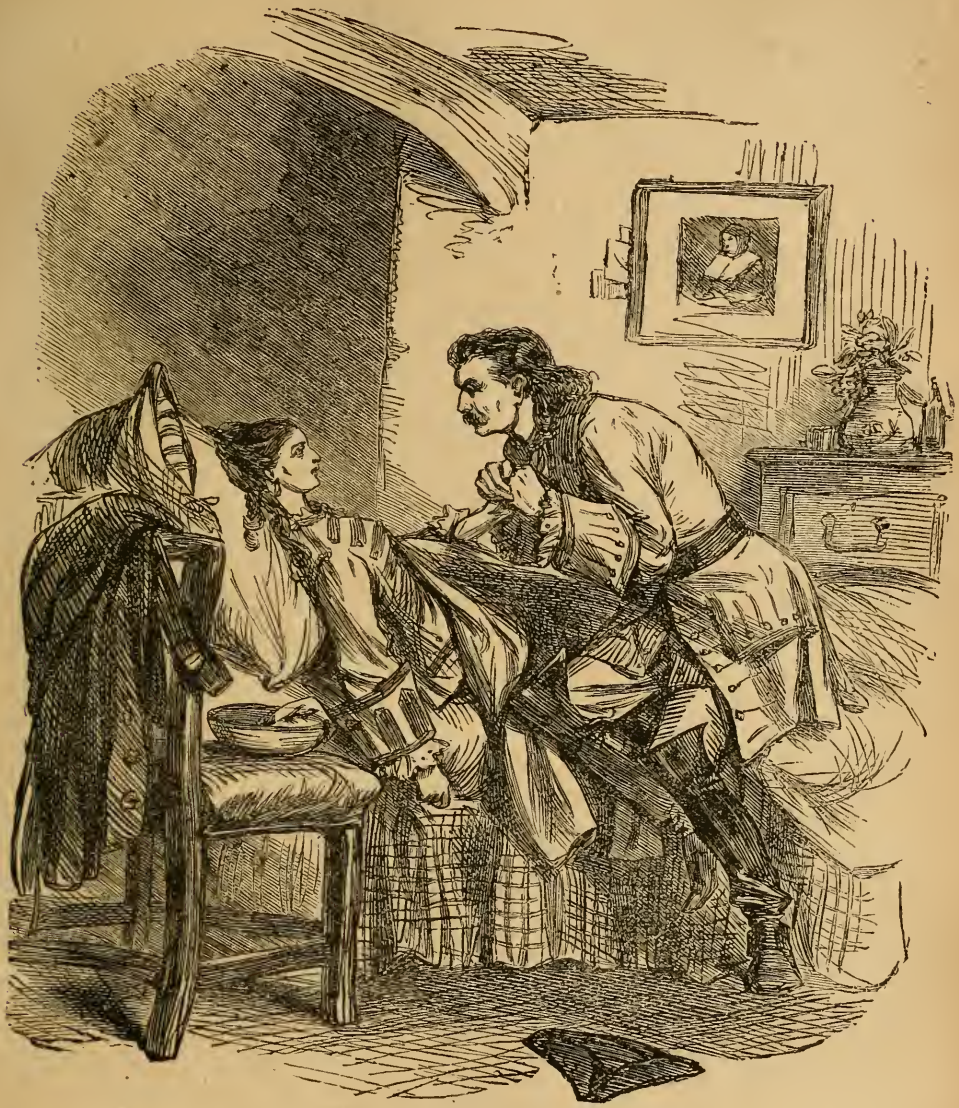
When he saw Claude and Tom also succeed in liberating themselves, he was overcome with joy.

Despite the terrible nature of his situation, he by no means looked upon it with the same sensations as he had done a moment or so previously.

He was quite certain that no effort upon their part would be wanting to set him once again at liberty.

This conviction caused him to resign himself still more calmly into the hands of his captors.

Skellum, however, was furious at the slight amount of success he had met with.



[DICK TURPIN AT MAUD'S DEATH-BED.]

He could not understand it.

Still, one would have thought that he might have experienced some amount of contentment and satisfaction at having made four prisoners, one of whom was no other than the notorious Sixteen-String Jack, who had hitherto so skilfully contrived to elude capture.

For all that, though, Mr. Skellum was bitterly disappointed.

He had made sure of capturing the whole of the band, and now his chances of doing so seemed somewhat doubtful.

Like a prudent and sensible man, however, he elected to remain and take great care of those prisoners he had made, and left to his subordinates the task of keeping up the pursuit.

It was not long before, owing to the darkness of the evening, both pursuers and pursued were quickly lost to sight.

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When this was the case he turned round to address those of the men who remained with him, and whose numbers anyone would have thought were more than sufficient to prevent any possibility of escape or rescue.

"Now, then," he cried, in savage tones, "look to all being made right and secure, and without any more delay we will turn our faces Londonward.

He drew near to Sixteen-String Jack as he spoke, for of course he was his most important prisoner.

"It shall be a short shrift for you, my buck!" he said to Jack, glaring at him horribly with his squinting eyes. "You may think that you will give me the slip as you have done others who have had you in custody; but if you do," he added, with a horrible imprecation, "I'll forgive you!"

There was something about this man's manner more revengeful and malevolent than Jack had ever experienced.

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But he affected to take no notice of what had just been said, behaving as though he thought the words had been addressed to anyone rather than himself.

This, as he quite anticipated, made Skellum more savage than ever.

But just at this moment an officer came behind him and touched him on the shoulder.

Skellum turned round quickly.

"Well, what is it?" he said, sharply.

"Beg pardon, sir, but—"

"Come, out with it!"

"I wanted to know whether you had decided on any particular plan for carrying your prisoners to London?"

Skellum remained silent.

In good truth he had not once thought of what had just been mentioned, though he did not care about acknowledging so much to his subordinate.

Nevertheless, in a subdued tone, he asked:

"Am I wrong in thinking, Jenkins, that you have some particular plan to propose?"

"Well, sir, I—"

"Have you not thought of something which you deem will be worthy of being put in practice? If so, speak—don't be afraid."

"Well, Mr. Skellum, I had been thinking that as two of our prisoners happened to be women it would be necessary to find out some way of taking them safely."

"Very good; and how do you propose to do it?"

"Why, you must remember that there is a farm-house not very many miles from here."

Well?"

"I thought if we went there we might be able to borrow some kind of a covered vehicle in which we could place them all, and to which we could harness six or eight horses. We should be able to keep good guard round, and prevent anyone from getting out of it; and it strikes me that the prisoners would be carried to London much sooner."

Mr. Skellum paused to consider.

"Yours is not a very bad plan, and something of the sort must be adopted."

"Yes, sir."

"But I can propose an amendment which I believe will be an improvement."

The officer looked expectant.

"It can't be many miles to Salisbury, can it?"

"It can't; though I don't justly know how far it may be."

"Well, we will, in the first place, make our way there, and, having arrived, we'll engage the stage-coach."

"Engage the stage-coach!" echoed the officer, in some surprise.

"Yes, we can easily do so. That, you will see, is a much better vehicle for rapid travelling than anything on wheels that we could hope to find at a farm-house."

"Besides, the whole of you could take it in turns to ride on and in the coach along with the prisoners, which would rest you from the fatigues of riding continually."

"Very true, sir, so it would."

"Then let it be done. We can continue to keep the prisoners secure until then."

"And I suppose you would wish some one sent on to Salisbury to make the necessary arrangements?"

"Yes; and now I think of it, that service cannot be performed better by anyone than yourself."

The officer bowed low to this compliment, as he said:

"Then, with your permission, Mr. Skellum, I will start at once."

"Yes, yes—the sooner the better. I will see to the rest."

The officer departed, mounted his horse, and was soon galloping to his destination.

Although this dialogue had taken place within a few paces of where Sixteen-String Jack stood, yet the speakers had been careful to carry it on in a tone so low that he was unable to overhear many consecutive words of it.

He was not able to catch sufficient to enable him to comprehend their intentions.

A scene of considerable animation now ensued.

Without any exception, the police officers were most solicitous to preserve the prisoners they had made, and turned all their attention to this end.

By the special direction of Skellum, Sixteen-String Jack was accommodated with several yards of strong

rope, which the officers had brought with them for the purpose of securing their prisoners.

This was bound round him in many directions, and knotted everywhere with so much tightness that it was only by enduring much pain that he managed to move even a single limb.

Tom Davis was also strongly bound, he being considered a most desperate character.

As for Mrs. Davis, her state of bodily feebleness was too extreme for any fears to be apprehended on her account. Still, in spite of the remonstrance of Ellen and Sixteen-String Jack, her hands were tightly tied behind her.

Ellen herself was even more carefully secured.

The whole were then mounted, and at an easy rate the whole procession started for Salisbury.

Little occurred upon the route, for the darkness was great and the loneliness extreme.

Sixteen-String Jack strove to pierce the gloom, and listened for any sound which might betoken the contiguity of his comrades, but in vain.

Bound as he was, and so closely surrounded by resolute, well-armed men, whose sole care was to look sharp after him, of course Sixteen-String Jack had no chance—nay, not even the ghost of a chance—of making his escape.

Owing to the difficulties with which they were beset, it was not until day had fairly begun that they rode into the ancient city of Salisbury.

The intelligence of their anticipated arrival had been noised abroad, for the officer had made no secret of the matter.

The consequence was that a large concourse of people were assembled outside the city, all of whom were filled with curiosity to see the notorious highwayman.

When Jack first caught sight of them his spirits rose, for the thought occurred to him that their presence might be owing to the exertions of his associates.

But a moment's reflection, as well as the demeanour of the vast multitude, convinced him of his error.

But he determined not to allow any trace of his vexation to be manifest; and so, although it cost him a great effort, he held up his head and looked calmly around him.

All the way to the inn at which the stage-coach was standing the way was lined with people, crushing, crowding, and jostling with each other, and only kept clear of the advancing cavalcade with much difficulty.

At length, however, the inn was reached in safety.

It now became necessary for the police officers to arrange themselves in a semicircle in order to keep off the people.

A little delay now took place, for the wants of the horses were attended to, and the officers themselves refreshed, for they were all hungry and thirsty.

Refreshments were offered also to all the prisoners, who, however, declined to receive anything.

Mr. Skellum's impatience to reach London was too great to allow any unnecessary lingering, and ere long all was in readiness for a start.

One of the best horses was then picked out, and an officer selected to ride him.

This man was to gallop on in advance, and give notice of their coming, making arrangements for frequent relays of horses, so that no unnecessary delay might take place.

Sixteen-String Jack was then lifted into the stage-coach, for his bonds were of such a character as to render him incapable of entering by himself.

His three fellow-prisoners were then pushed in after him, and two police-officers followed.

Both were strong, resolute, well-armed men, and were seated at the opposite doors, so as to give an immediate alarm in case of any movement on the part of the prisoners.

Other officers would have entered had there been room, but the interior of the stage-coach was only constructed to carry six passengers.

The doors were then secured by means of chains and padlocks, and as many well-armed police officers as could be accommodated then took seats upon the roof.

Thus freighted, the stage-coach moved off amidst the tumultuous cries of the assembled people.

Mr. Skellum himself sat next to the driver, and his queer-looking little figure and unprepossessing countenance called forth abundance of remark.

No less than six horses were harnessed to the coach, and as they were all of the best quality there could be little doubt but that they would be able to make good speed upon their journey.

The remainder of the police, mounted upon their horses, formed a kind of guard or escort round the stage-coach, which they were careful to surround completely.

It was in this fashion that Sixteen-String Jack quitted the good city of Salisbury and began his journey towards London.

Such skillful arrangements as these were well calculated to prevent all possibility of the occurrence of any escape whatever, either through the astuteness of the prisoners themselves or through any attack which might be made upon them by their friends in the course of the journey they were about to take.

That such precautions were not unnecessary the reader must be aware, since nothing was more likely than that Sixteen-String Jack's companions would attempt to rescue him.

But Jack's own heart sank within him when he witnessed the preparations made for his safe detention, and a deeper gloom than ever settled upon his spirits.

As for Tom Davis, he did nothing but reproach himself over and over again, for he persisted in attributing the calamity which had occurred to his presence among the highwaymen.

"But for me," he groaned out repeatedly, "this would never have happened. Oh, that I should live to see such a day as this!"

"You might have expected that it would come sooner or later, Tom. Let us hear no more of your reproaches, they are unjust."

But Davis would not listen to this.

As for Mrs. Davis, she was too much overcome, both bodily and mentally, to be able to take cognisance of what was being said. She seemed, indeed, to be unconscious of everything that was going on around her.

No tears filled her eyes—no sobs broke from her breast.

She sat stony cold and apathetic, exhibiting that form of intense grief which is most painful to look upon.

As for Ellen, she wept incessantly.

These tears would not allow her to speak, but her self-reproaches were none the less audible to herself.

She felt strongly, although no one had dropped a hint to that effect, that she, and she alone, was to blame for what had happened.

It was as clear to her as noonday that the police officers had followed in her footsteps in consequence of not taking sufficient precautions for secrecy, although the necessity of doing so had been so strongly impressed upon her by Old Matthew.

She could not help thinking of all this, and yet she felt that if she continued to do so the harrowing nature of her reflections would drive her mad.

She expected that Sixteen-String Jack would overwhelm her with the bitterest reproaches for the evil which she had brought down upon him.

But our old friend never thought of uttering one word.

On the way his thoughts were about equally divided between wondering what had become of his companions and how they had fared in their flight, and endeavouring to devise some means of escape.

The latter was a difficult enough task, and one that was more than sufficient to occupy all his thoughts.

He trusted that the extraordinary vigilance of his captors would abate after a reasonable time had elapsed, but he found, to his disappointment, that the nearer they drew to the metropolis the more did their watchfulness increase.

CHAP' ER MLXV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND HIS COMPANIONS ARRIVE AT BOW ST EET POLICE-STATION.

"My eyes and limbs! What is coming now? Blow me up as tight as a bladder if ever I see such a thing afore! Here missus—missus, just come here, will you, and have a look! There's a treat in store for your eyesight—spifficate me, if there isn't!"

These very extraordinary ejaculatory phrases were given utterance to disjointedly by the keeper of the tollgate at Tyburn.

He had just put his head outside of the door of his little wooden house, and, happening to look along the road to the westward, had caught sight of an extraordinary spectacle.

The latter part of his speech was addressed to his better half, who, having been on the late turn the preceding night, had not yet left her morning couch.

As may be supposed, the violent outcry had the effect of arousing her, and, actuated by that spirit of curiosity which is so prevailing a characteristic of the sex, sprang from the bed, and in a state of extraordinary dishabille, and without hesitation, projected her head through the window.

She then remained transfixed with astonishment, and became wholly unconscious of the extraordinary figure that she made.

The object which had attracted their attention so forcibly was the stage-coach, upon the top of which the police officers were clustered so thickly, and which was so completely surrounded by others on horse-back.

"Good lauk!" ejaculated the tollkeeper's wife, at length "What can be the matter?"

"Blame me if I know!"

"It must be the Young Pretender caught at last! Serves him right! I hope he is."

"Don't be a fool, you idiot! Go ar I stick your stupid old head under the bed-clothes again! The Young Pretender! Bah! The idea of such a thing!"

"I hope as how it is the wagabone!" continued the fair lady, apparently unmoved by the epithets addressed to her by her husband. "It's how he ought to be, and all who think with him—them's my sentiments, and I don't care who knows them!"

For the behoof of those who may not quite understand what was meant by this sudden outbreak of mutual wrath we may as well simply state that the tollkeeper and his wife happened to belong to precisely the opposite parties of politics—he being a blind Jacobite, and she a staunch Hanoverian—so that, in consequence, many were the fiery encounters which occurred every day, every topic somehow leading to this irreconcilable one.

Probably these little lively discussions served to vary what must be the awful monotony of keeping a toll-gate.

On the present occasion, however, the tollman himself was so much surprised at what he saw that he abandoned politics entirely.

"It's a d—d sight more likely to be Dick Turpin!" he muttered, as the cavalcade came nearer.

The words reached the ears of his yoke-fellow.

"Dick Turpin caught at last! I hope he is! Serves him right! So he ought to be—and all such villains!"

"Hold your row, will you! Don't I tell you that whenever you open your mouth you make a confounded fool of yourself!"

"That's as you may think; but when it comes to fooling—"

"Hold your row, I say! Can't you see they are close to the gate?"

Expectancy and curiosity now made the woman silent.

All her faculties were concentrated in gazing upon the spectacle before her.

The desire to know who it could be thus strongly and acedulously guarded now reached burning point.

A single horseman—a police officer—rode about two hundred yards in advance of the rest of the procession.

He was the one who had undertaken to arrange the relays upon the road; but as the place where the last change had been effected was passed he had fallen back upon the main body, and only rode forward now in order that there should be no delay at the toll-gate.

"Open—open!" he cried, as he came nearer. "Be quick, I command you, in the name of the King!"

"Will you settle for the toll?" was the pertinent question asked by the pikeman, as he fumbled in his pocket for the key.

"Yes, yes—of course I will."

"That's enough, then."

The gate was unlocked and opened.

During this operation the tollman said.

"May I make so bold as to inquire who it is that's

you have so strongly guarded yonder? Is it Dick Turpin?"

"No—but one of his associates."

"Who?"

"Why, Sixteen-String Jack, to be sure, and the people that used to keep a ken for them."

"Who are they?"

"Stand aside, unless you wish to be trodden down under the horses' feet!"

The man shrank back quickly, and at the same moment the stage-coach and its escort dashed at a tremendous pace through the gate.

It was gone almost like a flash, and left nothing but a cloud of blinding, choking dust behind it.

"Puff—puff—a-chew—a-tish-o! The devil!" sneezed the tollkeeper, whose lungs were full. "Tuppence a-piece for the horses, and thruppence for the coach."

The demand was settled, and the police officer galloped after his companions.

The hour was comparatively speaking an early one, and but few people as yet appeared in the streets of the metropolis, for the shops were closed.

Yet those who were abroad turned without exception a glance of strong curiosity upon the throng as it dashed by, and many were the speculations indulged in as to the meaning of what they saw.

Few guessed rightly.

On rolled the cortege without interruption or delay until Bow Street was reached.

With a dash and a clatter as had not been heard there for many a day they pulled up the panting horses in front of the entrance to the station.

A scene of tremendous and indescribable noise and confusion ensued, which was in part caused by the mounted officers endeavouring to surround the stage-coach still more closely, and by those who were on the top descending hastily, so as to be in readiness for action, should it be requisite.

With that facility and rapidity for which London is famous, a crowd of persons assembled in the street, and every fleeting second witnessed some accession to their number.

The officials in the police-station were all on the alert, and the superintendent soon made his appearance.

All were alike impatient and anxious to know what important prisoner it was that had arrived.

Under the directions of Mr. Skellum, who was of course puffed up by importance, the officers on foot were drawn up so as to form a kind of lane reaching from the door of the coach to the door of the police station.

All was expectation and suspense.

Ellen was the first lifted out of the coach.

With downcast head and streaming eyes she hurried as rapidly as she could through the living thoroughfare, and felt relieved when she passed beneath the dark and gloomy portal.

Two police officers conducted her to the charge-room.

Mrs. Davis was lifted out next.

The journey had told most fearfully upon her.

She was more like one dead than alive, and had so far lost all use of her limbs that she had to be carried by her guards, who deposited her upon the rude bench just inside the charge-room—so called, because it was here that prisoners were in the first instance taken, in order that the charge against them may be entered by the inspector.

Tom Davis followed.

Foot follow! he strove to keep up as brave an appearance as he could for the sake of those with whom he was connected, but he succeeded very indifferently indeed.

Sixteen-String Jack was the last to leave the vehicle.

The public curiosity had now reached its highest point, for it had become known who he was, and all present were equally anxious to catch a glimpse of the bold highwayman of whom they had heard so much.

"He looks helpless enough now, anyway," remarked one of the bystanders.

The remark was true enough.

Jack was helpless.

He had to be lifted out by two strong men.

The cord with which he had been so tightly bound had never once been moved or slackened since the commencement of the journey.

The consequence was that all his muscles had stiffened, until he had lost all power over them.

It was a despairing, dejected glance which our poor friend cast around him as he was quickly hurried past his foes.

He scarcely dared to hope that he should catch sight of any friendly, well-known countenance; but that he had, almost unknown to himself as it were, indulged in such a hope was evidenced by the disappointment he felt upon being carried into the narrow passage without having done so.

Owing to the restrictions of the circulation, he was icy cold, and his heart only beat with the feeblest of pulsations.

So serious was his condition deemed that his bonds were at once released and his limbs chafed before a roaring fire, the warmth of which seemed to have the effect of infusing some little vigour into the scarcely animate frame of Mrs. Davis.

Jack soon felt the better for this treatment, and by the time the operation was over the inspector made his appearance at the little wooden desk by the window, and prepared to enter the charges in the book before him.

This matter of form was speedily gone through.

The least important of the prisoners—that is to say, Tom Davis, his wife, and Ellen—were dealt with first.

The charge against the first was, of course, his having escaped from custody after a previous conviction.

The two next, merely for having been found in the company of the highwaymen.

Then it came to Jack's turn.

"What charge shall I enter against him?" the inspector asked.

"Why, highway robbery, of course."

"But what one in particular?"

"That cannot be told at present. It will be enough for you to enter the general charge, as the rewards have been out for him so long."

"I don't want to be told my duty by such as you!" growled the inspector.

"It is your fault that I spoke at all," retorted the officer.

"Hold your row a minute! Now sign this."

The book was pushed towards him, and then he wrote his name.

This brought the preliminary business to a conclusion.

The next step was to remove the prisoners to some place of security until the time came for opening the Court.

Some little discussion arose upon this point.

The usual course was to remove all prisoners to a large underground cell, where they were all herded together like so many cattle.

But it was considered by Mr. Skellum that this would not suit any of his prisoners, who were required to be looked after with much more than ordinary care.

Finally, it was settled that Ellen and Mrs. Davis should be confined together in one cell, the state of the latter being such as to require attention.

Tom Davis was accommodated with a separate chamber, in which also sat two well-armed police officers, who were instructed to watch closely his every movement, and raise an immediate alarm if the least reason arose for doing so.

Sixteen-String Jack was also conveyed to a separate cell, but his bonds were not removed.

Four officers shared the cell with him; and Mr. Skellum's dread of Sixteen-String Jack's power of escape was so great that he also deputed four more men to watch on the outside of the double-locked and strongly-barred door.

After that he felt tolerably assured of their safety; but he could by no means make up his mind to quit the station, though he was so worn out with fatigue as scarcely to be able to rise after having once sat down.

But it was necessary that some specific charge should be preferred against Sixteen-String Jack when he was brought before the magistrate.

There was no time to lose in seeing to this.

The aid of the inspector was called in.

"We must have something sure and undisputed," Skellum said to him.

"What is it to be?"

"The difficulty is, I suppose, to make a selection?"

"Just so."

"Then consider it over."

"I have it."

"Well?"

"Do you remember that case that occurred not long since, when this Sixteen-String Jack, in conjunction with Claude Duval, robbed a couple of bailiffs?"

"Yes—yes!"

"That will be the case, then."

"Right."

"But can you find these men?"

"Yes, without difficulty."

"And have them in readiness to appear when the Court opens?"

"Yes—then or very soon after it."

"Then let me request you to see to it at once."

The inspector promised that no time should be lost; and Mr. Skellum, in despite of his anxiety and determination to be wakeful, dozed off to sleep at the top of the steps which led to the cells in which his prisoners were confined.

He was aroused by the return of the inspector.

"All right," he said. "They will be here directly. The case is as clear as daylight, and will serve well enough for the first and principal count on the indictment at the sessions. He is sure to be convicted."

"I should think so," said Skellum, stretching himself wearily. "If I could have my way, such fellows should be strung up as soon as captured. It would be the saving of a world of trouble and expense."

"You are right. If such was the law of the land there would be fewer such freebooters abroad, I'm thinking."

"What's the time?"

"Close on ten. But I've been thinking, Mr. Skellum—"

"What?"

"Why, that since they have been here you have given the prisoners no breakfast. Who knows, they might be *ovadacious* enough to complain about it?"

"They might; but I will just pop down and see myself how they are getting on, and I will ask them at the same time whether they would like to take anything. I shall feel better satisfied when I have seen with my own eyes that they are all right."

Accordingly Skellum, with some difficulty, arose, for all his limbs felt stiffer than ever.

Down he went to the cells, where he found everything just as he could wish it.

His question as to whether any refreshment was wanted was answered negatively in all cases.

With a feeling of tolerable satisfaction, nevertheless, Skellum made his way to the upper air again.

He then found that the magistrate had arrived, and the Court had opened.

As was usually the case, the long list of "night charges," as they are termed, had to be disposed of.

An hour was generally thus occupied, for the chief magistrate made very short work of the delinquents.

By that time Skellum hoped the two bailiffs would arrive, because he wished to have a little confidential talk with them before they stood up in the witness-box.

In this hope he was not disappointed.

The inspector soon after brought the two men before him, and a long whispered conference ensued.

CHAPTER MLXVI.

THE MAGISTRATE DULY COMMITS SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND HIS COMPANIONS TO TAKE THEIR TRIAL AT THE NEXT OLD BAILEY SESSIONS.

THE intelligence that Sixteen-String Jack, the notorious highwayman, had been brought in a coach, a strongly-bound prisoner, to Bow Street police-station flew with lightning-like rapidity all over London.

No one who heard the news was uninterested in it, and for that morning at least our old friend formed the general topic of conversation.

For one anxious to be known among men, this would

doubtless have been very delightful; but Jack thought nothing at all of the matter.

Indeed, he would much rather that the public tongue had been otherwise employed.

Upon no one, however, did the intelligence produce so deep an effect as on Old Matthew.

The shock first of all deprived him of all sense and motion.

But with returning consciousness came absolute incredulity.

He could not bring himself to believe that such an awful catastrophe had taken place.

But from everyone he heard some confirmation of the disastrous news.

As we have said, all lips were employed upon the subject.

Many and various were the details of the affair; but about the main fact there was universal consistency.

Old Matthew resolved to set out and learn the truth.

He could bear to hear the worst much better than he could bring himself to remain in inaction and doubtful suspense.

The distance to the Bow Street police-station was not great, so that in a few moments after leaving his own door he reached his destination.

The great concourse of people standing in the roadway afforded corroborative evidence that something very unusual had occurred.

Mingling with the throng Matthew listened to the remarks made by those around him.

These served to confirm the worst.

The most general account was that Sixteen-String Jack and several of his accomplices were fast prisoners, and that his comrades had been mortally wounded, and by this time were doubtless on their way to London under the protection of a strong escort.

Old Matthew groaned inwardly.

By what he heard, he soon came to find how it was that the officers had got upon the highwaymen's track, and he bitterly blamed himself for his own want of caution.

He saw plainly enough that he, and he alone, had been the primary cause of the disaster.

Had he but made use of a greater amount of care and precaution, most probably nothing of the kind would have happened—at any rate, the severity of the misfortune would have been much mitigated.

His self-reproaches were of the keenest character.

But, as the reader knows full well, Old Matthew was not the man to dwell idly upon any grievance, no matter how serious the character of it might be.

Accordingly, before many minutes had elapsed, he set himself to work to think what would be the best thing to be done upon the present emergency.

He had the strongest wish to aid Sixteen-String Jack and those who were with him; but the question was, how should he accomplish it?

After much anxious deliberation he could think of nothing better than to engage a lawyer to watch the case at the police court.

For this there was no time to lose, as the hour for commencing business in the court was close at hand.

With some difficulty, then, Old Matthew disengaged himself from the dense mass of people by whom he was surrounded, and walked meditatively away.

"I am afraid it will be quite a useless thing," he said, to himself. "His commitment is sure to follow—not the eloquence and subtlety of all the lawyers in the land can prevent it. Still, for all that, if Jack finds some one there, it will serve as a reminder to him that he is by no means forgotten by his friends."

The last consideration had the effect of fixing his determination in his mind, and with a firmer and more rapid step he made his way towards Lyon's Inn.

Passing under the gloomy archway, he directed his course towards a tall, dingy-looking house situated in one corner of the quadrangle.

"I know not whether I shall find him here so early," muttered Matthew, as he ascended a dark and narrow flight of stairs; "and yet, I suppose, like plenty more, he sleeps at his chambers."

The portly landlady had to pause more than once in

his ascent of the stairs; but at length he paused before a door at the summit of the topmost flight.

He had to knock repeatedly before any notice was taken of his presence, and then the door was opened by a young man in a very alarming condition of undress.

He seemed astonished when he beheld his visitor; but after a momentary hesitation he invited him to enter.

Old Matthew obeyed.

It needed but one glance round the apartment into which he had just penetrated to afford satisfactory evidence that the inmate of it was by no means well off in worldly goods and chattels.

Indeed, the aspect of poverty was so apparent as to send a chill through Old Matthew's heart.

"You look surprised to see me, Mr. Godfrey," the landlord began; "but you told me once, when sitting in my bar-parlour, that you should look upon anyone who gave you a little legal employment as a benefactor, and so—"

"And so my warm-hearted friend," said the young man addressed, his thin and wasted face lighted up the while with a feeble smile—"and so you have been getting into trouble of some sort merely in order to—"

"No, my young friend, you mistake; but some persons in whom I happen to feel a very warm interest are at this moment in much distress and danger, and I have come to you, thinking you might be able to help them out of it."

"Well—well," said the young lawyer, with greater huskiness of manner observable than before, "I will do my best. But let me know in what precise circumstances your friends stand."

Old Matthew, then, with great freedom, told him just what had happened, and requested him to watch the case on behalf of the prisoners when they were taken before the magistrate.

But the young lawyer shook his head.

"You don't feel inclined to mix yourself up in the business, then?" said Matthew, rising from the rickety chair on which he had been seated. "I should not have thought," he added, as he glanced around at the bare walls, "that you would have been so scrupulous."

"Nay, nay—do not be offended, Mr. Gale. You are too hasty. You did not understand me."

Old Matthew stopped at once.

"I mean that I can do nothing that will be of service to these people. The public and legal feeling is very strong against them, and you may depend every effort will be tried to make an example of them."

"I know all that; but still it would be better that they should not be altogether undefended, and if you are willing to undertake the case I myself will pay you liberally for your trouble."

The lawyer hesitated.

He felt that, so far as his future prospects were concerned, it would be by no means wise to mix himself up in so questionable a transaction as this.

But he had been waiting months and months in hunger and poverty for business of some sort to be brought to him; but none had come.

At the present moment he had all but reached the end of his resources.

If he threw this chance away it might be long indeed before he had another.

This consideration decided him.

He held out his hand to Old Matthew.

"Depend upon it," he said, "I will do my best, though I am afraid that when it is done you will think it but little."

"Make haste, and apparel yourself, then. I will wait here for you, and we will both walk to Bow Street together."

"As you please."

"I want you to procure me admission to the court," pursued Matthew; "and you may take my word for it that it will be no easy matter to-day."

"I can manage it, nevertheless, I daresay," was the response. "Sit down a moment. I will be with you almost immediately."

He passed into an adjoining room as he spoke.

But our old friend was too much agitated to be able to sit down quietly.

During the absence of the young man he walked about uneasily.

Fortunately, he was not long kept in suspense.

Mr. Godfrey appeared, and without further pause they descended into the street.

At a brisk pace they walked to the police-court; and such good use had Old Matthew made of his time that they reached it just as the proceedings were about to commence.

For the young lawyer to gain admittance was an easy enough matter, and a small gratuity slipped into the palm of the stern guardian at the door procured admittance for Old Matthew also, who was also so lucky as to get a seat among the lawyers.

Just as he sat down a side door was opened and the magistrate made his appearance.

His clerk was already seated at the little table below him, and immediately upon the appearance of his superior he stood up and whispered something which seemed of a very satisfactory nature, for the magistrate, whose face had been frowning and sullen, now smiled and rubbed his hands together briskly, as if much pleased.

The reader will guess that the communication was concerning Sixteen-String Jack and his associates.

The Court was now opened in due form, and the ordinary business of the day commenced.

Old Matthew thought there would never be an end to the tedious night charges; but at length the termination of his impatience was reached, for the last case was dismissed.

There was then an immediate stir and commotion in the little Court, as though all were preparing to listen with greater attention to what was about to follow next.

Matthew was most anxious and expectant, for he did not know who would be the first to be brought forward.

But his incertitude upon this point was quickly put an end to by the ushering of Mrs. Davis and Ellen into the dock.

The former, being quite unable to stand, was accommodated with a chair.

Ellen buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

"Who are these people?" asked the magistrate, in an under tone.

"Accomplices," whispered the clerk, in reply, yet loud enough to be heard almost all over the Court.

Then, rising to his feet, with a paper before him, he said:

"Prisoners at the bar, you are charged with aiding, abetting, and comforting several of the most notorious desperadoes in his Majesty's dominions, which is felony. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

Mrs. Davis was too far gone to pay attention to what was going on around her.

Ellen's voice was choked by her sobs and tears.

The magistrate's clerk repeated his question.

"Does anyone appear on behalf of these people?" inquired the magistrate.

"I do," replied Mr. Godfrey, rising immediately.

This had the effect of calling the attention of the prisoners to him.

Both at the same time saw Old Matthew, who nodded his head rapidly, as though to intimate that all was right.

His presence wonderfully composed both.

Mr. Godfrey came close to the dock, and, leaning over, whispered:

"Say, 'Not guilty,' both of you, as loud as you can, and leave the rest to me."

They nodded in acquiescence, and obeyed.

Mr. Skellum now placed himself in the witness-box.

He glanced around the court, and particularly at the magistrate, with a very self-satisfied air.

"Do you appear to give evidence against the prisoners?" asked the clerk.

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"Antrobus Skellum."

"And profession?"

"A—a—a—officer of police."

"What have you to depose?" inquired the magistrate, seeing that his spy was somewhat embarrassed by the last question.

"Your worship," he said, "on the eleventh of the present month I captured the two prisoners at Stonehenge. They were then in company with Dick Turpin and his notorious companions, and, from the way in which we found them all conferring together, I have no doubt they were planning some fresh and daring robbery."

"They have both been in custody before upon the same charge, I think?"

"They have. It is now only about a month since their liberation. They were let off the first time with an easy sentence."

"That, then, is the charge?"

"It is."

Another police officer was then called, who corroborated Skellum's testimony, and the magistrate said:

"Prisoners at the bar, what have you to say in your own defence?"

"Your worship," said Mr. Godfrey, rising quickly to his feet, "will, I presume, commit the prisoners for trial?"

"Sir—"

"I say your worship will, I presume—"

"I allow no one to presume in this Court."

"But—"

"Let me have none of your buts or barrels either!"

"Really, your worship, you will excuse me saying that this exhibition of petulance is very undignified and very unworthy of you."

The justice was unable to speak from passion, so Mr. Godfrey took advantage of his silence to say:

"I am advised to say that the prisoners will reserve their defence."

"Very good; then they stand committed to take their trial, and bail will not be taken; and if you or any other young jackanapes attempt to dictate to me I will have you committed for contempt of Court."

Mr. Godfrey sat down, very wisely taking no notice of what had just been said.

Tom Davis was next placed in the dock.

His eyes wandered round the Court as though in search of some one, and presently he saw Old Matthew, who again endeavoured to show that all was well.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the clerk, reading from his paper, "you stand charged with feloniously aiding, abetting, and comforting several desperate offenders against the law, to wit, Dick Turpin and others; and also with obstructing the officers in the discharge of their duty; and still further with having escaped from custody while on your way to a penal settlement to which you had been sentenced for the remaining term of your natural life. Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

In obedience to a whisper from Mr. Godfrey, a plea of not guilty was returned.

Mr. Skellum was again the chief witness, and he deposed, of course, to the capture of Tom Davis under the circumstances so well known to the reader.

Another witness—also a police officer—identified the prisoner as having before been tried and condemned, and having been removed from custody by the aid of a desperate band of highwaymen.

Mr. Godfrey again stated, in answer to the usual question, that the prisoner reserved his defence.

After this the magistrate had nothing else to do than commit the prisoner to take his trial at the next sessions at the Old Bailey—which he did *pro forma*.

Immediately afterwards the prisoner was removed.

Then again there was that indescribable commotion which betokened that all were anxious and expectant.

What had gone before might be likened to some trifling interlude at a theatre, introduced as a kind of preface to the *pièce de résistance* of the evening.

All eyes were turned towards the narrow doorway through which the prisoners were brought into the Court.

There was a moment of suspenseful silence, and Sixteen-String Jack was more than half carried into the dock, where he remained with a police officer standing on each side of him.

All eyes were fixed upon him, for all were equally anxious to gaze upon so notorious and daring an offender against the laws.

It was sufficiently embarrassing to remain thus the cynosure of so many eyes, and subject to such close scrutiny; but our old friend preserved an undaunted calmness of demeanour which was as far removed from vulgar insolence as it was from shrinking cowardice.

As the silence continued, Jack took the opportunity of looking well round the Court, which he did apparently with a most unembarrassed air.

Of course, he saw his old associate and friend, the landlord of the White Horse; and one glance at his ruddy, jovial-looking countenance made the prisoner more comfortable and at ease in his mind than he had hitherto been.

Jack experienced to the full that intense satisfaction which all cannot help feeling when, in the hour of adversity, they find themselves not forgotten by those who were friendly in prosperity.

It was such a solace to Jack's heart as no words could possibly express.

It was a most unusual thing for a prisoner to be brought to the bar strongly bound as Sixteen-String Jack was, and this fact alone was the cause of a very great deal of attention being bestowed upon him.

"It is somewhat irregular, is it not, for a prisoner to be brought up thus?"

"It is," replied Mr. Skellum, glibly; "but the well-known recklessness and audacity of the prisoner made us feel that we were not exceeding our duty by taking these precautions to keep him perfectly secure."

This speech was greeted by a general hiss from the body of the spectators, coupled with loud cries of "Shame—shame!"

The magistrate stood up, black in the face with passion.

"Clear the Court," he yelled—"clear the Court! I will allow no such manifestations of sympathy with a desperate criminal like the one before us!"

A scene now of tremendous excitement and confusion ensued, for the police were only too glad to put the magistrate's injunction into execution.

But their task was not accomplished without a great deal of difficulty.

Finally, however, the numbers of the officers, and their hard, thick staves prevailed, and the people were driven out and the door closed.

In a minute or two afterwards comparative silence was obtained.

Mr. Skellum made a succession of bows, and intimated his desire to have an opportunity to speak.

"If your worship thinks," he said, in cringing tones, "that I have exceeded my duty in the care I have taken to have the prisoner strongly bound, with a view of preventing the possibility of an escape, and if your worship wishes it, the bonds can be unloosed."

"No—no!" replied the magistrate, at length. "I consider the desperate and well-known character of the accused is such as fully to warrant us in adopting this extreme course, for which the prisoner has only to thank his own violence."

"I am not aware that I have offered any," said Jack, firmly, speaking for the first time.

"Pray say nothing," whispered Mr. Godfrey, earnestly. "Leave all the talking to me. I want you to do nothing but plead not guilty when the proper moment comes."

Jack promised obedience.

The ordinary formalities were then commenced and proceeded with.

Jack put in his plea as he had been advised.

As before, Mr. Skellum made his appearance in the witness-box.

Having been sworn, the clerk asked—

"Do you recognise the prisoner at the bar?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"His name, I believe, is John Rann, but he is more commonly and popularly known as Sixteen-String Jack. He is so called in the handbill offering an aggregate reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for him and his accomplices."

"You have a description of him there, I suppose?"

CHAPTER MLXVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAS A STRONG ESCORT TO NEW-GATE.

EVEN after Sixteen-String Jack had taken up his position in the dock, the deep expectant silence continued.

"Yes, your worship."

"Read it."

Skellum obeyed.

"That establishes the identity beyond all question," remarked the magistrate. "We could not possibly have better evidence than that."

"Just so, your worship."

"Now let us hear the full particulars of the matter."

"Yes, your worship."

Amid a profound silence, Skellum began.

We shall give his narrative rather fully, as the reader will then comprehend what aspect the matter presented when treated by him.

"From certain information received, your worship, I went down to Stonehenge, where, as I had reason to suppose, the highwaymen contemplated a meeting."

"And you found you were right?"

"Yes, your worship. By carefully surrounding the place we found them all together. They were well armed, every one, and furious at so close a prospect of defeat. However, we rushed upon them, calling out to surrender. But instead of paying any attention, the most violent resistance was at once commenced. Pistols were fired, and we were obliged to make use of our weapons in self-defence."

"Well," said the magistrate, inquiringly, for Skellum paused, "is that all?"

"No, your worship."

"Go on, then."

"The resistance these men made cannot be imagined—as may be learned by the fact that five police officers have been killed, and ten more now lie dangerously wounded, and scarcely expected to recover."

"And the other highwaymen—where are they?"

"They succeeded in violently breaking through our ranks; but all three, or, I should say, four who thus got off were badly wounded, and separate bodies of officers were sent after each. They cannot fail to be captured ere long. I expect every moment to hear tidings of their death or capture."

"But this one, you say, you secured?"

"Yes, your worship, though it was with much more difficulty than your worship can form any conception of."

"It seems to me that you have acted very gallantly, and I will take care that your resolute and courageous conduct shall be duly represented in the proper quarter."

"Thanks, your worship. But I feel I have done no more than my duty," replied Skellum, in a whining tone, who, however, thought nothing of the kind.

"Well—well, say no more about that. Go on with your deposition. Can you, or any of your force, positively swear that one of the police officers received his death-wound at the hands of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I have no doubt that such is the case," said Mr. Skellum, after a momentary hesitation, for he seemed in doubt how to reply; "but—"

"You cannot prove it?"

"I cannot, your worship—that is, not satisfactorily."

"Enough. But you have some specific charge against him?"

"Oh, yes, your worship!"

"What is it?"

"Two highly-respectable men will identify him, and also swear to him as one of two by whom they were attacked and robbed only a short time ago."

"That will do, then. You can stand down."

Skellum looked askance at Mr. Godfrey, as though he quite expected to be cross-examined; but he was disappointed.

The lawyer merely made a sign; but it expressed plainly enough, "Stand down; I don't want you."

One of the bailiffs was then put into the witness-box.

He was a snabby, underminded-looking fellow, who fidgeted with the front of the witness box as though very far from being at his ease.

"Well, what is your name?"

"John Rutter."

"What are you?"

"A bailiff."

"Look at the prisoner at the bar. Do you recognise him?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"The man who robbed me of a large sum of money and put me in great bodily fear of my life."

"Was it the prisoner who took the money?"

"It was."

"And you swear positively that this is the same man?"

"Most positively, your worship."

"Just relate briefly the particulars of the case."

The bailiff complied.

As, however, all the details of the adventure between Claude and Jack and the two tipstaves must be fresh in the recollection of the reader, we forbear from repeating his words.

Although he considerably exaggerated the occurrence, yet the deviation from the absolute truth was not extraordinary.

Mr. Godfrey did not think proper to ask this witness any questions.

Indeed, he saw that nothing could save Jack from committal, so that it would have been an absolute waste of time.

The other bailiff then corroborated what had been said by his partner, and this closed the case.

The evidence was certainly more than sufficient to warrant the magistrate in discharging the duty required at his hands in such cases.

"Prisoner at the bar," he exclaimed, "have you anything to say?"

Mr. Godfrey rose instantly.

"Your worship," he said, "as the accused will inevitably be sent to take his trial, he reserves his defence till then, being unwilling to occupy needlessly your worship's valuable time."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the magistrate sneeringly.

Then, in a different voice, he added, turning to the dock:

"Prisoner at the bar, you stand fully committed to take your trial at the next sessions at the Old Bailey, upon the charge of highway robbery, and of obstructing his Majesty's officers in the execution of their duty."

This was the last case, and as the worthy magistrate had some luncheon waiting for him in the adjoining room he made a precipitate and very undignified retreat through the little door by means of which he had gained admission to the Court.

At a given signal a stream of officers poured into the Court for the purpose of removing the prisoner.

We should have stated that, when the order for clearing the Court was carried out, our old friend Matthew was not ejected.

This was solely through the good offices of the lawyer, next to whom he was seated.

Now that the magistrate had left the Court the worthy landlord did not hesitate to quit his place and press towards the dock.

Sixteen-String Jack saw him, and smiled a recognition.

But the smile was a sickly and feeble one: by no means like that which in former times habitually irradiated his features.

"Be of good heart, Jack," Matthew cried, though Mr. Godfrey plucked him by the sleeve and besought him to be silent—"be of good heart, old boy! Remember you have friends yet who will do the best they can for you."

Jack shook his head, which was, indeed, about the only movement he was capable of making.

The officers then closed densely round him.

Skellum looked at Old Matthew with a hungry eye, as though he would much have liked to take him prisoner.

But Matthew knew well enough that the words he had made use of were not enough to bring him within the power of the law.

But Skellum resolved that a good watch should be set upon the contumacious landlord, of whose powers he, with good reason, had abundant dread.

By main bodily force Sixteen-String Jack was lifted up by his guards, and in this manner carried out of the Court into an adjoining room.

Old Matthew and the lawyer went towards the street.



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN HIS CELL AT NEWGATE.]

This now presented a startling spectacle.

It was completely blocked up as far as ever the eye could reach in every direction by a surging, swaying mass of human beings, who had all been drawn to the spot in the hope of catching a glimpse of the notorious prisoner.

The same desire caused all the windows and house-tops around from which a view might be obtained to be lined with faces.

"If they were only in the humour," mused Matthew, as his eye wandered over the vast assemblage, "how easy it would be to make Jack a free man!"

It was quite easy to see, however, that no such thought as this found a home in the breasts of those who composed the huge multitude.

So long as their gaping curiosity was gratified, their satisfaction would be complete.

No. 231.—BLACK BESS.

The appearance of Matthew and his companion at the door, together with certain movements on the part of the police officers, caused the whisper to circulate with lightning-like rapidity among the crowd:

"He's coming—he's coming!"

Matthew and the lawyer were quickly compelled to quit their position, as they would otherwise have interfered with the arrangements made.

The same anxious care and determination to avoid all risk of escape characterised the present movements of the police.

All the officers who could be spared were drawn up in a double line, which commenced at the threshold of the police-court and ended at the door of the hackney-coach which had been provided for the transit of the prisoner to Newgate.

All these men were armed with drawn cutlasses

It will be understood that they thus formed a lane of about five yards in length, the walls of which were composed of resolute men.

The barrier was one by no means to be easily broken through.

The hackney-coach was also surrounded in a similar manner, in order to prevent the populace from crowding too closely round it.

Jack's case was hopeless indeed.

Had he been possessed of ever so much subtlety and strength, escape would have been impossible.

A few moments of anxious suspense elapsed.

Then the prisoner appeared.

It was hard indeed, if not impossible, for those who were on foot to distinguish him from his captors, so closely was he surrounded by them.

Not content with the way in which he had been secured already, fresh bonds had been added, and the effect of these was to deprive him of the use of every limb.

Just as though he had been some carefully-packed piece of statue-work the highwayman was carried down the passage and across the pavement to the door of the coach, which was held wide open in readiness to receive him.

The mob set up a cheer, though what they cheered at is hard to say; but, then, it is well known that a British mob eagerly seizes upon making any kind of demonstration.

Sixteen-String Jack was lifted into the vehicle, and deposited in a somewhat awkward manner upon one of the seats.

As many officers as the carriage would conveniently hold crowded in after him for the purpose of keeping a strict watch upon all his proceedings.

The others sat on the roof with their legs dangling down over the windows, while others, again, seated themselves upon the driver's seat.

In the meanwhile, under the directions of Skellum, those police officers who had assisted in forming the living lane were sent to reinforce those who formed a ring round the coach.

As soon as this was done Mr. Skellum gave a signal, and the horses were immediately set in motion.

This occasioned another cheer from the populace, who, far from having their curiosity gratified, resolved to follow the vehicle to its destination.

Owing to the great weight of the load, the two lean-ribbed horses harnessed to the hackney-coach were unable to take it at a more rapid rate than a walk.

But this pace just suited those officers who had to keep up with them, their orders being to preserve the cordon strictly until they reached the prison.

Slow and tedious was the journey.

Many and various were the stoppages that took place.

To Jack the time seemed twice as long as it was in reality.

To some extent this was occasioned by the discomfort which he experienced.

His position was as awkward and uncomfortable a one as could have been imagined, and it would have been an easy enough matter to alter it.

But the police showed no inclination to trouble themselves, and Jack would have suffered anything rather than have made the request—perhaps, even, to be refused.

At length the corner of the Old Bailey was turned, and the gloomy walls of Newgate came into view.

Jack knew it, though he was so placed that he could not see them.

In another moment the jolting, lumbering conveyance came to a final halt.

CHAPTER MLXVIII.

REVERTS TO THE PERILOUS POSITION OF DICK TURPIN AND MAUD.

FAIN would we continue exclusively to devote ourselves to a consideration of Sixteen-String Jack, now he is in a position of so much greater danger than any that had befallen him during the whole of his long career.

But in order to preserve something like a chronological

sequence of events it is imperative that we should leave him awhile upon the very threshold of the heart-chilling old prison of Newgate.

We promise, however, to return to him with all possible celerity.

But there are others on behalf of whom it is believed the reader feels an interest of no ordinary kind, and whose perils, if anything, exceeded those which happened to Jack himself.

Of the subsequent movements of his comrades nothing further is known than what was stated by Mr. Skellum in the presence of the magistrate.

Whether his confident anticipations of a speedy further capture were well or ill founded we shall now proceed to show.

First of all, then, we shall devote ourselves to a relation of what befel our hero, Dick Turpin.

It will be recollected how gallantly he had raised Maud upon finding that she had been wounded, and how the consciousness of her imminent and deadly danger had enabled him successfully to fight his way through the death-storm that raged around him.

He had swung Maud on to the saddle before him, and mounted himself.

Then, while the bullets showered round him like hail, he had urged Black Bess to make speed now if ever she had done so in her life before.

Need we say how nobly the gallant, incomparable steed acquitted herself?

Her speed was something which, if beheld, would make the observer believe that "his eyes were the fools of his other senses."

It the twinkling of an eye her sable form mingled with, and was swallowed up by, the darkness which everywhere prevailed.

On the soft turf her hoof-strokes were inaudible, or nearly so.

But although his pursuers were soon left behind, Dick would not suffer her to relax her speed.

On the wide open plain of Salisbury no refuge could be found for him—he must make his way to some place miles and miles off.

Since their starting Maud had never once moved in the slightest degree.

He had called to her.

But in vain.

No answer was returned to his earnest words.

He felt her hands.

They were icy cold.

So, too, was her face.

Again and again he called as they rushed headlong on in the deep darkness, but with no better result than before.

He placed his hand upon her breast, but withdrew it instantly.

He had touched something cold, clammy, and sticky.

He knew full well what it was without the aid of vision.

It was blood.

A terrible groan escaped his lips.

Then he turned his head to listen.

Floating faintly upon the wind he heard, or fancied he could hear, the trampling of many horses' feet upon the turf, as well as loud shouts and cries.

"I cannot stop now," he muttered, as he urged Bess to make fresh exertions. "That would only be to precipitate our fate. No, no! On, Bess—on, my lass! Our only hope is in speedily reaching some place of shelter."

But where was he to seek for this, with the whole country alive with foes all eagerly searching for him?

Oh, how he wished that Tom King was with him!

By his guidance, the vessel engaged to take them across the Channel could have been gained, and then, doubtless safety would have laid before them.

As it was, Dick had only the vaguest idea in the world of the position of the smugglers' cave.

Could he but have reached this it would have been a place of safe refuge.

But in this he was equally at fault.

So sudden, too, had been his flight from the ruins, and so intense the darkness which prevailed, that he could

not take upon himself to say with any degree of certitude whether he was going in the direction of the sea-coast or away from it.

He was compelled, too, to keep on this random course for the want of knowing which way to turn out of it.

These reflections, together with Maud's continued state of inanimation, seemed to have the effect of searing his heart and brain with fire.

On, on he sped, until the seemingly interminable expanse of Salisbury Plain was crossed.

On, on farther and farther still—across dusty high-roads—down narrow, winding lanes—over the open country—away—away—

Past houses and little clusters of humble cottages—places where he would have stopped for a brief space in order that Maud's hurt might be looked to; but in vain—in vain.

Either in reality, or else in his exaggerated fancy, he could still hear his pursuers tearing after him with redoubled speed, and calling upon him to surrender.

Although the speed of his mare was now greater than he had ever known it to be before, he did not scruple to urge her to still greater efforts.

To say that the various objects in the landscape seemed to sweep past them like rapidly-flitting shadows would be to convey a feeble and inadequate idea of her tremendous rate of speed.

And still Maud had neither moved nor spoken, nor had she shown herself to be in the slightest degree conscious of Dick's anxious and impassioned calls to her.

He had placed his hand over her heart—in close and dangerous proximity to which vital organ was a gaping wound. He pressed tightly upon it, for by this means the flow of blood was checked, and at the same time he tried to ascertain whether there was any pulsation.

At times he fancied he could detect a feeble, fluttering beat; but it was so faint and so uncertain that he was full of doubts upon it.

And every moment of his headlong career the agony he suffered was almost beyond endurance.

What if Maud should die?

What if this ghastly wound should prove a local one?

The thought drove him frantic.

The blood in his veins seemed turned to liquid, boiling metal.

A mist came over his eyes.

All objects seemed bathed in blood, and it was only by a great effort and a species of instinct that he retained his balance, for he had swayed fearfully to one side.

He had forgotten all about his own wound.

The excitement under which he had laboured since receiving it had made him altogether forgetful that he had received an injury at all.

Now it only made its presence felt by means of the weakness that had been produced by excessive loss of blood.

This proves, of course, that the wound was by no means of a serious character.

Indeed, had it been bound up at the first, probably nothing more would have been felt of it, the injury being quite superficial.

The violent exertion of riding on horseback at such a furious pace, as well as the feverish condition of his blood, caused the hemorrhage to be much greater than it would have been under other circumstances.

But finding that he grew rapidly weaker every moment, Dick brought his foaming steed to stand-still.

He then roughly and hastily bound up his wound; but the task of doing so at all was one of no ordinary difficulty.

The good effects of it, however, very quickly made themselves apparent.

He listened—listened intently, for there came upon his ears faintly and from afar off a strange monotonous sound.

"What is it?" Dick asked himself—"what is it?"

He listened again.

"It is the sea!" he cried, in a voice of joyfulness.

"We must be at no great distance from the coast. Fast as you have been, Bess, lass, I little thought you had brought us so far in such a little time. Yes, yes, there can be no doubt about it—it is the sea!"

At this moment Maud made a slight movement.

It was the first since they had left the ruins.

A faint, fluttering sigh also escaped her lips.

The sound made Dick's heart bound within him.

"Maud dearest!" he cried. "Listen—oh! listen to me!

Cheer up! Believe me, the danger now is past, and we are safe! Hark! can you not hear the breakers roar? We are close to the coast, and in a few minutes we shall reach it."

Dick paused anxiously for a reply.

But none came.

He was left equally in doubt as to whether Maud was incapable of utterance, or whether she had failed to hear the words which he had addressed to her.

In either case it was folly to linger longer.

The first and most important step was to get out of danger, and he strongly felt that every moment of time was of incalculable importance.

Accordingly, despite his anguished state of doubt, he again set Black Bess in motion.

Unexpectedly finding himself thus at the sea coast changed the current of all Dick's previous thoughts and intentions.

He felt now that he could not do a wiser thing than engage some little vessel to take them across the Channel.

The only thing against it was that Maud's hurt required immediate attention, and that the delay and journey across the sea would have the effect of aggravating its unfavourable symptoms.

But, then, on the other hand, it seemed quite certain that, under the most favourable conditions, a considerable length of time would elapse before Maud would be sufficiently recovered to move, and it was too much to expect that they would be allowed to remain undisturbed by the police officers during such an interval.

From the strength of the force which had attacked them—so much more numerous than any other which had been brought against them—he was sure that unremitting efforts would be made to recapture him.

He had pursued a tolerably straight course hitherto, having put into practice no stratagem whatever of a character calculated to lead them astray.

All that he had gained was time; and if he only gave the officers the opportunity they would soon be up with him again.

Then, with Maud lying on a sick couch, what could he do?

Not leave her to the care of others, for she was obnoxious to the law like himself, and they would show her no consideration because of her injuries.

The only chance that he had was to quit the coast altogether.

Whether he should be able to do this or not was doubtful; but with an undaunted heart Dick rode on.

It was never his nature to meet difficulties half way.

He waited till they faced him, and then his undaunted resolution generally enabled him to overcome them.

Already he could see in the distance a long white line of light, which indicated the whereabouts of the breakers.

Animated by the sight, he pushed on with more rapidity.

At last the water's edge was reached.

The spot upon which he had chanced was a bleak and desolate one.

As far as the eye could reach on either side nothing could be seen but a long line of broken, jagged coast, on which the waves broke ceaselessly with a tumultuous roar.

No human habitation could be descried.

Dick's heart sank within him when he asked himself the question, what human beings could be found who would choose such a spot for an abiding-place?

Some distance further on he might perhaps find what he sought; but he knew not which direction to take—the right or the left.

Scarcely pausing to consider—for an hour's deliberation would not have brought him any nearer to a decision—he chose the latter.

The nature of the ground was such as to prevent any considerable speed being made.

Yet he pushed on with greater swiftness than anyone could have expected.

Suddenly, however, he came upon a small indentation in the shore, which had been hidden from him by the huge masses of rock.

Nothing could have come upon him more unexpectedly.

He pulled up, and uttered an exclamation, the tone of which showed that he had made a pleasant discovery.

And in truth he had.

Below him, but easily accessible by means of a zigzag path, could be seen a small cluster of cottages, seemingly the abode of fishermen.

Drawn up high and dry on the reach were several boats of various sizes, but all of such a kind as would be used for fishing.

Dick now believed that the way of escape lay clear and plain before him.

Without hesitation he commenced to descend the zigzag path we have mentioned.

A few minutes served to bring him to the huts, for by this word they are most appropriately called.

The inhabitants of the little hamlet seemed long since to have retired to rest.

From one window, and one only, came a dim, uncertain ray of light.

To Dick Turpin it was a beacon, and he hastened towards it with rapid strides.

Arriving at the door, he knocked loudly at it.

But he had to knock a second time before any notice was taken.

Then the door was opened, and the gaunt, attenuated figure of a man presented itself upon the threshold.

The flickering light from the small, rude-made iron lamp he carried vividly displayed the deep, sunken hollow of his cheeks.

"Who are you?" he said, in hoarse, guttural tones, which were in admirable keeping with the roughness of his exterior. "What want you, that you should disturb the dying at this hour?"

The word "dying" struck upon Dick's heart with an ominous chill.

So much so, that, without being conscious of so doing, he echoed it.

"Ay, dying," reiterated the man. "Tell me quickly what you want?"

"I am in sore distress and danger," said Dick, "and I want an immediate passage to France."

"Then you want what you cannot have."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because there is no man living who would venture to put off from the shore to-night. Immediate destruction would be the result. Had it not been so, think you those boats would be lying idly on the beach?"

Dick's heart sank within him.

Already he fancied the officers were upon him.

Certainly they would arrive ere long.

"Well," said the man, "why stand you here? Have I not spoken? I say again it is impossible."

"My good friend," said Dick, in a deep and broken voice, "did you not tell me some one was dying here?"

"Ay, my wife."

"Your wife?" repeated Dick, struck with the strangeness of the coincidence.

"Yes—and the best that ever man was blessed with! When she is gone I—I—"

Sobs choked his further utterance, and tears rolled down the rugged, weatherbeaten face.

"Is the case hopeless?" said Dick—"wholly and completely hopeless? Is there nothing that can be done that will give her some chance of recovery?"

"Why—why, yes, there is; but it was a mockery for the doctor to mention it."

"What is it?"

"Never mind. Why should I parley with you?"

"Simply because I, too, have the same grief as your-

self. My wife, who is with me here, is, I fear, dying, and the only chance there is of saving both her life and mine is that we reach the French coast to-morrow."

"That is your sole chance?"

"It is."

"Heaven help you, then!"

"But what is yours?"

"Why, delicacies—nutritious substances, luxuries only, 'thin the reach of the rich man's purse. The idea," he added, with a bitter laugh, "to tell that to a man who is himself dying for the bare necessities of life!"

"Hush—hush!" said Dick. "Be calm."

"Calm?"

"Yes. Repine no longer, for I believe that it is decreed by fate that we shall be of assistance to each other."

"In what way do you mean?" asked the man, with extreme eagerness.

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"Well?"

"If you save my wife's life by the performance of the service I require, I, in return for it, will give you such a sum of money as will make you comparatively a rich man for life—so rich that there is no delicacy, however extravagant in price, which will be beyond your powers of purchase."

CHAPTER MLXIX.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN GETTING A PASSAGE TO THE COAST OF FRANCE.

THE man looked upon Dick with an air of amazed incredulity.

He was speechless.

"Do you understand me?" Dick asked, at length.

"Are you in earnest?"

"I never was more so in my life. Come, speak quickly! Say whether the deaths of three persons shall rest upon your head."

The man hesitated.

"You want to cross to France?"

"I do."

"And now?"

"At once."

"I fear it is certain death to attempt it."

"Tush—tush, man! Who can say?"

"Well, I can; for you may believe me or not as you think proper, but there is no man here who could be found willing to put off to sea on such a boisterous night."

"But think of what a powerful incentive you have before you! You might not, perhaps, feel inclined to risk your all upon the uncertain chance of catching a few fish, but yet you might if you knew that your wife's life was at stake, and that you could save it."

"I know not who you are," said the man, with sudden energy, "thus to tempt me to destruction, but—but make good your promise, and—and I will take you."

"I swear to do so," said Dick, solemnly—"swear by everything which men hold sacred!"

"Enough! I consent."

"And how long will it take you to make your preparations?"

"Half an hour."

"It must be less."

"It shall be, if possible."

"Then I will alight and enter. I see you have a fire burning, and the warmth may serve to recover my wife from her swoon."

While speaking, he slipped from the saddle and tried to lift Maud down.

But his strength was insufficient.

The fisherman ran to his assistance, and by their united exertions Maud was carried in.

"Why—why," cried the fisherman, in surprise, "here is blood!"

"Yes; did I not tell you she was wounded?"

"I did not hear you."

"Quick—quick! I will tell you more anon—at present we have no time to talk."

"What is it?" cried some one, in a feeble voice—

feeble that Dick felt Death must be very close at hand indeed.

The voice came from one corner of the hut.

There was not much light, but still Dick could just perceive the outlines of a dark mass, apparently of rags, which served the purpose of a bed.

A second glance enabled him to make out the wasted form of a woman, who looked around her in manifest amazement.

"Hush—hush, Bessie!" said the fisherman, in a voice so tender that Dick could scarcely believe his ears served him rightly. "Do not excite yourself, but take my word that all is well. Fortune has sent this gentleman to save us. He requires a quick passage to France, and I have agreed to take him; and the payment I shall receive will make us rich for life."

"No, no," said the woman, wildly—"do not go—do not trust yourself again upon the sea! You told me last night that no one could set out."

"Yes—yes," said the man, soothingly; "but that is some hours ago. Be content to leave this matter quite to me, and in the end all will be well."

"No, no—not well! But I am dying—slowly but surely dying!"

"But you remember what the doctor said, Bessie?" exclaimed the fisherman, bending over the humble bed. "He told you that if you could have certain things you would recover, and this gentleman will give me enough to enable me to buy them."

The woman wept.

"I see how it is," she said, through her tears, "though you would fain conceal it from me. You are willing desperately to risk your life upon the bare chance of saving me."

"No—no."

"But I say yes!"

"And I again say no! Not only does your life, but the lives of this gentleman and his wife, depend upon me; and must I selfishly sacrifice them all? No, no! I must go, Bessie. Keep up your spirits till I return—I shall not be long."

The woman wept still.

There was a gloomy, heavy foreboding in her heart.

While these words had been passing between the fisherman and his wife, Dick had by no means been an idle listener.

On the contrary, he had placed Maud in as comfortable a position as he could in front of the fire, in the hope of infusing fresh warmth into her chilled frame.

He also endeavoured to ascertain the character of the wound.

But he found the blood had coagulated in a mass over the orifice, thus forming a natural styptic.

He knew well enough if this clot was removed the hemorrhage would re-commence, and he would be powerless to stanch it.

Until medical aid could be obtained, it was best to leave this as it was.

Dick would have given much had he been able to ascertain more exactly the nature and extent of the wound.

His greatest apprehensions were excited by its position, which made him fear that the hurt was a mortal one.

He strove hard to think otherwise, and occupied himself by endeavouring to bring her back to reanimation.

But it was not until the fisherman had left the cottage for the purpose of getting the boat in readiness for launching that he succeeded.

Maud opened her eyes quietly and languidly.

Her gaze fell upon Dick's face, and her face lighted up with a faint smile.

She pressed his hand to show her thankfulness at finding him safe and apparently unhurt.

She was about to speak, but Dick checked her by a rapid gesture.

He was afraid that any attempt to exercise her voice would be attended with the worst and most dangerous results.

"Do not attempt to utter one syllable," he said, in low tones, but sufficiently loud for her to catch the purport of what he said. "Be satisfied for me to tell you that the danger is over, and that in a very short time all will be well—quite well."

Maud shook her head.

"Yes, yes! Believe me, I speak truly. We are even now about to embark for France. We are now in a cottage on the sea-coast. If you listen, you will hear the roaring of the breakers."

Again Maud seemed as though about to speak.

But Dick checked her once more.

"Silence is imperative," he said. "Once more I ask you to be content with my earnest assurance that all is well."

"No, no," she said, in a low, hurried whisper—"all is not well, Dick, for—for, Dick, I feel that I am dying."

"No, no!" Dick cried, with eager earnestness, though while he spoke his heart swelled so painfully as to be well-nigh past endurance. "You are weak and faint from loss of blood, I know; but that has ceased, and when we reach France medical aid can be had without fear of the result. Cheer up, dear one! A brighter and happier dawn is coming."

As he spoke, Maud felt that in one sense it might be so, but she offered no remark.

Indeed, the effort to speak as much as she had was so severe as to render her incapable of repeating it.

As for Dick himself, he was constrained to turn aside to conceal his emotions.

There was that on Maud's face which he could not bear to look upon.

It was something indescribable, yet he was innately conscious that the cause of the effect was the flappings of Death's sable pinions.

Fortunately for him, it was at this moment that the fisherman returned.

"Is all ready?" asked Dick, eagerly.

"Yes, quite."

"Then do not let us lose another moment."

The fisherman bade his wife a hasty, whispered adieu.

Dick partially raised Maud.

The fisherman came to his aid, and between them she was carried to the vessel.

The roughness of the ocean had now to a very considerable extent abated—a circumstance which did not fail to cause Dick sensations of great pleasure.

Still, it was what an old sailor would have called a "dirty" night.

The bark which was in readiness for them was small in size, and yet large when the fact that one man could work it was taken into consideration.

Maud was carried on board, and, as a matter of course, was made as comfortable as the nature of things permitted.

The next thing was to get Black Bess also aboard the craft, and had she not been so docile and so thoroughly obedient to her master's will, the task would have been one of no ordinary difficulty.

The fisherman was filled with wonder.

"Your horse seems to have as much intelligence as a Christian."

"She is worth her weight in gold," said Dick, caressing her fondly. "Had it not been for her to-night—"

He ceased, for he thought it would not be prudent to let the fisherman know too much.

All now was in readiness.

The boat was pushed off from the shore, and the fisherman climbed over the side.

A few strokes with the oar carried them fairly out on to the ocean, and then the task of hoisting the sail was commenced.

In this operation Dick was of great service.

"If this breeze continues," said the fisherman, "and all goes well, we shall make a speedier journey to France than has been heard of for many a year."

Dick looked around him, or, more correctly speaking, he endeavoured to do so.

But so intense was the darkness that the surface of the waves could scarcely be distinguished.

Already the recently-left land had vanished altogether from their view, and as he tried unsuccessfully to pierce the gloom which hung before them like some velvet pall, Dick was indeed sensible of the amount of courage, skill, and daring requisite to enable anyone to undertake such a journey.

But the demeanour of the fisherman filled him with admiration, and at the same time inspired him with confidence.

Now that he was afloat, there was no eagerness or excitement about him.

He was as calm to all outward appearances as it was possible for a human being to be under any circumstances.

It was evident now that he thought nothing of the risk and danger of the undertaking, but bent all his energies towards bringing it to a successful termination.

When the sail was properly fixed, the motion of the vessel was much accelerated, and Dick found an opportunity of placing himself beside Maud.

She was shivering with cold.

His first care was to wrap her up still more effectually.

He could not see her face—the darkness was too great for that.

But he spoke reassuring words to her, and over and over again repeated that they were now free from all danger.

He could tell that his words were heard and understood by the occasional and feeble pressure of her hand.

The boat surged through the foaming water at a furious rate.

The fisherman was right when he said if the wind continued steadfast the passage would be a quick one.

At present it blew directly from the English coast, and as they carried quite as much, perhaps even more, sail than was exactly compatible with ordinary safety, and as the fisherman added to the velocity by working lustily at the oars, it may be believed that their rate of progress was sufficiently rapid.

And yet, despite this swiftness, Dick was full of all-devouring impatience.

This, however, was on Maud's account, which was enough to account for it.

Every moment Dick fancied she grew colder and colder, and he was inwardly conscious that her life was ebbing fast away, while he was powerless to arrest its departure.

Nothing could have shown more convincingly how perilous was her condition than the fact that up to the present moment she had not seemed to have observed the absence of Dick Turpin's comrades, on behalf of whom the reader will scarcely require to be told Dick himself experienced the utmost anxiety.

He feared, and feared truly, that things had gone hard with them.

Insensibly he was led to think of how strange it was that this stupendous catastrophe should have taken place at a moment when they felt most convinced of their own safety, and when they were all indulging in reflections upon the immunity from peril they were about to enjoy.

Of course, Dick was not so well informed as the reader is, and therefore he found it most difficult to think by what means the officers had been enabled so thoroughly to surprise them.

Things went on thus until, faintly and chilly, morning dawned upon the wide waste of waters.

Long before there was light enough in the east to enable any objects far away to be distinguished, Dick was standing up in the boat and looking earnestly in advance.

"We shall see land in a few minutes, Maud, dearest," he exclaimed, as the dawn brightened. "Cheer up, dear one, a little longer—only a little longer! The worst is over now, and assistance is close at hand. Do not—pray do not, for my sake, give way to despair! Believe me that you are safe."

A more convulsive pressure of his hand was all the reply which Maud was able to make to this speech.

Dick was in despair.

Again he bent down eagerly over her, looking into her countenance by the aid of the light which the dim gray dawn afforded.

This in itself was sufficient to impart to all objects a cold and ghastly appearance, so that it is not surprising that what he beheld should fill him with the most poignant grief.

Death-like indeed did her thin and pallid countenance appear.

Dick's heart swelled, and heavy drops of sorrow fell from his eyes.

Maud felt them.

Her eyes had hitherto been wearily closed, but now they opened.

Tears quickly rushed into them, obscuring all things, and again they closed.

Her lips parted with a faint, faint smile, which grieved Dick more to look upon than would the loudest manifestations of grief and pain.

Once more he sprang to his feet.

Once more shading his eyes with his hands, he looked keenly in advance.

An exclamation of joyfulness escaped him.

"Land—land," he cried—"land is in sight at last! Help now is at hand indeed!"

"Impossible," exclaimed the fisherman, drawing the oars into the boat.

"What is impossible?"

"Why, that land should be in sight."

"Come and look for yourself."

The fisherman came forward.

"You are right," he exclaimed. "I knew we had come swiftly, and yet I little thought that we were so near our journey's end. You have good cause to be thankful."

"I am indeed," replied Turpin, in heartfelt accents; "but yet every moment of time is precious."

"Maud, dearest," he added again, bending over her, "you heard me say that land is in sight? I can aid you best, and most truly show my love for you, by making every effort to increase our speed; I am about to leave you in order to assist the fisherman in rowing."

Dick turned away without giving Maud an opportunity to reply, or even to make a sign.

He took hold of one of the oars and prepared himself to use it.

"That's right!" said the fisherman. "It will make a wonderful difference."

As may be expected, Dick Turpin was not very expert in the use of the oar, but yet he handled it in such a manner as to elicit the fisherman's admiration.

But then Dick felt he was rowing for a life that he accounted ten times more precious than his own, and so his exertions are not to be wondered at.

Without Maud he felt he should indeed be a wreck—a waif, and an outcast from all humanity.

After her death life would be nothing more to him than a weary blank.

CHAPTER MLXX.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN LOSES HIS NEAREST, DEAREST, TRUEST FRIEND.

GRADUALLY the morning brightened.

Dick and the fisherman laboured incessantly.

Although the land appeared to be so close, it seemed a weary time until it was fairly reached.

As they drew near to it, Dick perceived a small collection of houses—too small for the place to be dignified by the name of village.

What place it was, he was too busily occupied with his own thoughts to inquire.

Such matters of detail were far beneath his notice now. Just, however, as the sail was taken down, he said:

"Do you know of any person in this place who, by being well paid, would consent to receive us into a house?"

"I do know a poor widow, who lives in the end cottage yonder; it is a poor place, as you see."

"Quite good enough," interrupted Turpin, impatiently.

"Will she receive us?—that is the question. Is there a doctor at hand?"

"Yes."

"How far off?"

"Perhaps a league."

"Quick—quick!"

The fisherman now slightly changed the direction of his boat, so as to enable them to land nearer to the widow's cottage.

Dick's impatience and anxiety had now reached fever point.

Maud was quite insensible.

No sooner did the keel of the little vessel grate upon the beach than he seized her in his arms and jumped ashore.

Black Bess instantly followed him in the same way that a huge spaniel might have done.

The fisherman was amazed to see how easily Dick ran with Maud in his arms across the rough beach towards the widow's door, and not less so at seeing Black Bess following in his footsteps.

With all speed possible he made secure his boat. Before he had finished doing so, Dick had gained admittance to the lowly dwelling.

The widow's kindly heart was at once touched.

As Dick was able to speak the French language sufficiently well to make himself understood, he had no difficulty in letting the widow know what he wanted.

Her kindly heart was at once touched both by his distress and Maud's dangerous-looking condition.

She consented instantly, and with pleased alacrity led the way to a small but clean inner chamber which was furnished as a bed-room.

Certainly Maud was deposited upon the bed.

"Leave her to me a moment or so," said the widow; "she needs my attention. Do you at once hasten for the doctor."

Dick immediately withdrew.

On reaching the threshold he found himself confronted by the fisherman.

"How far did you say it was to the doctor's?" he asked.

"About a league."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Then mount my mare—do not be afraid of her, she will carry you swiftly and safely. When you reach the doctor's let him mount her, in your place and gallop back."

"I will."

"Tell him that life and death depend upon his speed, and assure him that he shall be amply recompensed for his trouble."

Fortunately, the fisherman knew how to ride.

Upon an ordinary occasion Black Bess would have suffered no one save her master to cross her back, nor would he have allowed anyone else to mount her.

But now he patted her, and made her clearly understand the nature of his wishes.

"Quiet, old girl," he said—"quiet and quick! You will render me another priceless service this day!"

The next moment the fisherman was off.

Dick watched them as long as he could keep them in sight.

Then, with swelling heart and tear-filled eye, he turned and re-entered the cottage.

The old woman emerged from the inner room.

"She has recovered her consciousness, and has asked for you."

Dick reached the bedside at one stride.

Maud's face was turned anxiously and expectantly towards the door, and it lighted up joyfully when she caught sight of Dick's well-known form.

He bent down over her and grasped her hand.

"Maud, dearest, we are absolutely safe at last—no one can touch us here. The doctor will arrive directly. He will see to your hurt, and then—why, then all will be well."

Dick's voice almost entirely failed him as he gave utterance to the hope which he could not feel.

Maud shook her head.

"No, no, Dick," she answered, in a whisper so faint that he had to strain his sense of hearing to the utmost to catch the purport of her words—"do not try to fill me with a hope which you do not experience yourself."

"Nay, I—"

"Hush, hush! Hear me, Dick—I am dying—yes, slowly, surely dying. You will tell me that I only fancy this; but, believe me, I have a feeling within me of such a nature as convinces me that I am not mistaken."

"But this—is this dejection. When the doctor sees you your feelings will undergo a total change."

Again Maud slowly shook her head.

"But while there is life there is hope," Dick murmured, scarcely knowing what he was saying, for he could not close his eyes to the conviction that Death was indeed hovering over her.

But yet the doctor might be able to save her.

That was his last hope, and he clung to it with pertinacity.

A deep silence ensued.

Maud had again closed her eyes.

The slight exertion involved in keeping them open seemed now to be too much for her.

Her breath, too, seemed only to be drawn in irregular, spasmodic gasps.

Oh, how anxiously Dick waited for the sound that would be made by Bess returning!

The old woman came to the threshold.

"Run to the outer door," said Dick. "Look out well for the doctor. You will see him coming on a black horse. The very moment you catch sight of him let me know."

The widow promised obedience, and as soon as her aged, weakened powers would let her, took up the required station.

More anxious time then passed.

At length, however, after weary waiting, Dick heard her cry:

"Here he comes—here he comes! My faith, the horse seems to fly!"

Dick uttered an ejaculation of deep thankfulness.

In little more than a minute afterwards the clattering of a horse's hoofs came upon his ears.

Louder and louder grew the sound, until it ceased suddenly at the outer door.

Dick hurried out.

A white-haired gentleman, attired in black, dismounted.

For once Black Bess was left unheeded by her master.

He dragged the doctor in, and, as he did so, he hoarsely whispered in his ear:

"Save her—save her! Restore her once more to herself, and you shall name your own reward!"

"I will do my best," was the reply.

Dick paused upon the threshold of the inner room, which the doctor entered in company with the poor widow.

Dick seemed stupified with his grief.

How long he would have stood there in the same immovable attitude, apparently unconscious of everything, is hard indeed to say, had he not been aroused by a low neigh.

He started, went outside, and for a time was enabled to distract his anguish by attending to his steed.

But it was not until an hour had elapsed that the doctor came forth.

His face looked grave and sad, and in its general expression was such as to extinguish all Dick's hopes.

Nevertheless, he hurried forward.

"Well—well," he said, "what is the result? Tell me quickly! I can bear anything better than suspense!"

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"My good sir," he said, "you must prepare your mind for the worst."

"The worst?"

"Yes."

"Is the wound a mortal one?"

"It is."

Dick groaned.

"Be calm—be calm. Obtain what command you can over yourself, and enter her room. You will have but a short time to pass together now."

Dick clasped his hands over his face, and gave way to a transport of frantic grief, which the doctor in vain endeavoured to check or mitigate.

But the storm of passion was too violent to last very long.

As he grew calmer the doctor talked gravely to him.

Much that he said fell upon unheeding ears.

"Tell me," said Dick, presently, calming himself by a terrible effort: "Is what you tell me the absolute truth?"

"It is indeed. It is absolutely impossible for any individual to recover from such injuries as she has sustained."

"And—and do you think, doctor, if she had had medical assistance sooner that—"

"I suppose you had it at the earliest moment?"

"Heaven knows I had, indeed!"

"Then it is in vain to speculate upon the consequences of anything that could not have happened."

Dick bowed his head.

He understood full well what was meant by the speech.

Maud perhaps might have been saved had she received immediate surgical assistance.

This was, in truth, a most bitter thought for Dick, who would carry the reproach with him to the grave.

"You must not think of that," the doctor said, perceiving how deep was the impression he had made. "She told me you had done everything in the power of mortal man on her behalf. Linger here no longer, for, believe me, precious moments are flying fast."

"Is she, then—then really dy—"

A huge sob rose in the highwayman's throat and choked the word.

"She is," answered the doctor. "It would be false kindness to keep the knowledge from you."

The worst had now been made known, and Dick grew gradually calmer.

With some difficulty he prevailed upon the medical man to receive a small fee, for he declared that as he had done nothing, then nothing was his due.

With a heavy, faltering step, Dick made his way towards the threshold of Maud's room.

As he reached it her face again lighted up with the old smile, but on this occasion it caused Dick more anguish than a violent outburst of sorrow.

The next moment he was bending over her with her hand clasped in his.

For some moments he was mute, while Maud herself seemed too exhausted to utter a syllable.

Her lips parted, but no sound came from them.

In the silence, Dick could hear her painful and laboured attempt at respiration.

From the sound, it seemed as though the lungs had been seriously injured—too seriously for any hope of recovery to be indulged in.

"Dick," Maud faintly murmured, at length—"Dick, I have heard what the doctor has said; and even if I had not, your looks and my own feelings would have been sufficient to—to—"

"Nay, Maud," Dick cried, with a sudden outburst, for he could not trust himself to speak calmly, "I must and will believe that while there is life there is hope!"

"Then how slight must be your hope if you reckon it by the amount of life I have got now!" answered Maud, faintly. "No, no—I feel that at the most I have but a few minutes to live: let us make use of them in bidding each other a long farewell."

"And what will life be to me without you?" asked Dick, faintly, as he bent down yet lower over the humble couch.

Maud did not reply.

From her manner, it would seem as though she were endeavouring to pronounce the word "Farewell," but that utterance failed her.

Dick gazed again into her wan face.

Dim as his eyes were with burning tears, yet he could not help acknowledging that she was a true prophet.

There was that unmistakable hue spread over her whole countenance which proclaimed all too plainly that Death was hovering over her, and that in a brief space of time indeed he would let fall his fatal dart.

Maud vainly strove to speak.

The appearance of her countenance now filled the highwayman with dismay.

At length, by making what seemed to be almost a superhuman effort, Maud whispered a few words.

"Dick," she said, "I cannot see you, for the room is very dark; but kiss me once more, and say the word 'Farewell!' for we must part."

Dick pressed his lips upon hers with frantic vehemence. At the same time Maud sighed deeply.

It was her last breath.

The lips grew cold like those of a corpse.

Still Dick did not rise.

He could not as yet realise that Maud had passed away from him and from the world for evermore.

It did not seem to him as though there could by any possibility come such a sudden termination, and so awful a one, to their long and loving companionship.

Dick never knew how long he thus remained.

The widow ventured to the door, and saw him in the position we have described, and, unwilling to disturb him, went away.

But hours and hours passed away without any sound coming from the inner room.

Then she grew alarmed, and her terror had reached its highest pitch when the doctor made his appearance.

Business had brought him near, and so he had entered, thinking perhaps he might be of some service.

In his company, the widow entered the little bed-chamber.

Maud was then found quite dead, and Dick beside her, apparently dead also.

But the highwayman was only in a swoon.

The doctor recovered him; and, although life returned, yet his patient was in a high fever, and raging in delirium.

The cause of this was quickly found.

Dick had been wounded, as we have said.

The quantity of blood he had lost was immense, and the excitement he had suffered had brought on inflammation.

The doctor shook his head.

"We shall have a hard case here," he said. "I never saw an uglier-looking place in my life."

But, fortunately, Dick had fallen into good hands.

Unwearied was the care bestowed upon him.

In spite of it, however, he still remained delirious.

Strange indeed were the words to which he gave utterance in his ravings; and had he been in England, they would infallibly have led to his detection.

As it was, he spoke in English, and it so happened that the widow and the worthy doctor were entirely unacquainted with the language.

As money was found in his pockets, and as, after the lapse of three days, he evinced no signs of returning sense, Maud was buried in the little churchyard close at hand.

It was sad indeed to think that there should only be strangers to perform for her the last offices rendered to the dead.

There was no chief mourner by the grave when the coffin containing her remains was lowered into it.

But when the ceremony was concluded, and the earth was filled in, scarcely a dry eye could have been found in all the group that had assembled, for in that lonely spot on the sea-shore it was a rare occurrence for a stranger to be buried.

Had she been conscious of it, Maud would have had the satisfaction of knowing that, although in a foreign land, she had not been lowered into the grave unmourned and unregretted.

And as the people slowly dispersed they looked towards the widow's humble habitation, and whispered that in all probability no long time would elapse before they were called forth to witness another funeral.

And so passed away all that was mortal of the fond and faithful wife of Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

RETURNS TO SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE UPON HIS ARRIVAL AT NEWGATE.

ONCE more we take the reader back to the dismal old prison of Newgate.

It will be remembered that we left Sixteen-String Jack at the moment when the hackney-coach came to a standstill at its destination.

As the vehicle had crawled along so slowly the reader may make sure that the crowd which started from Bow Street considerably augmented in size after having passed through the principal streets of the metropolis.

By the time the prison was gained it had swelled to a bulk that excited considerable consternation in the breasts of Mr. Skellum and his assistants, for they apprehended a rescue.

Before, then, any attempt whatever was made to release Jack from the hackney-coach, the police officers placed themselves more densely round it, and so formidable was their force that they could undoubtedly have repelled a very serious onslaught.

But these precautions were all superfluous.

It did not seem as though the mob contemplated any aggressive movement.

They were content to remain spectators of the scene that was about to ensue.

While these steps were being taken, due notice was given at the portal of the prison that a prisoner of no ordinary importance had arrived.

Accordingly the door was opened by the man on the



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lock, and, at the suggestion of Mr. Skellum, all the available men on duty were summoned from their respective posts to the vestibule.

As at Bow Street, those police officers who were not packed round the coach were drawn up in a double lane, so as thoroughly to protect the prisoner during his brief passage from the one door to the other.

Of course, Jack could not help seeing all these precautions, and as he gazed he could not forbear smiling, for he had made up his mind not to attempt to escape under such hopeless circumstances as the present.

For this reason, all this superextra care seemed to him ridiculous.

At length all the preparations were complete, and then, and not till then, Mr. Skellum gave the signal for opening the door of the hackney-coach.

Jack was almost stifled, for the uncomfortable vehicle No. 232.—BLACK BEAR.

had been crammed with police officers to the fullest extent of its capacity.

These now alighted, leaving the prisoner, about whom they were so solicitous, perfectly helpless and motionless.

"All's ready," said Skellum. "Take hold, and carry him quick. I shall be glad when that part of the business is fairly over."

The command was obeyed with all imaginable promptitude.

Several of the strongest of the police officers lifted him up in their arms, and literally carried him across the pavement and up the steps into the vestibule of the prison.

Then, no sooner was the threshold crossed than the door was closed by Mr. Skellum himself, who gave utterance to an audible sigh of relief as he performed the operation.

Evidently he looked upon his tightly-bound prisoner as being many degrees safer than before.

An ordinary spectator would have been much amazed to see so many strong and well-armed men intent solely upon the safe custody of one who seemed the slimmest of the whole party.

Yet such was the extraordinary spectacle which the vestibule of Newgate presented.

Mr. Skellum next made his way towards the Governor, who was the successor to the man who had held the office at the time the highwaymen paid their last visit.

This present Governor had formerly been in the army, and in consequence he had created something resembling the discipline of a garrison in the prison.

"You see, Major Oneyer," said Skellum, with a half bow, "I have brought you a prisoner of some distinction, and I hope you will do the State good service by keeping him in safe custody."

"You may depend," answered the Governor, gruffly, and curling his huge moustache as he spoke—"you may depend that nothing on my part will be wanting."

"I am sure of it. Here are my necessary papers. please take them, and let me have the ordinary receipt in return."

The Governor scowled fearfully at the documents, and complied with the request just made.

"Of course," said Skellum, as he pocketed the important paper—"of course my duty properly ends here; but still, as I have more than ordinary interest in the safe custody of the prisoner, I will, with your consent, remain here and see him conveyed to his cell."

"I—I know my duty, sir!" said the major, drawing himself up to his full height, and assuming as much importance as he was able.

"I do not for a moment doubt it," said Skellum, with servile humbleness; "but still, as it would afford me very great satisfaction, I trust you will not refuse me the request."

"Well—well, I suppose not."

"Thank you, major; and if at any time I can be of service to you do not fail to command me."

The major turned on his heels with ill-concealed contempt expressed upon his countenance.

"Let the blacksmith come forward there at once!"

A door was opened, and the command repeated by one of the turnkeys, who shouted it down a passage with as much vigour as his lungs would permit.

A moment elapsed, and then a heavy, clattering, clanging sound was heard.

Jack could not resist the temptation of turning his head to ascertain the cause of it.

Directly afterwards the prison smith made his appearance.

He carried in one hand a large and heavy basket of tools, while behind him he dragged some unusually massive fetters, which certainly must have weighed at least two hundredweight.

The throng divided so as to allow this personage to come close to the prisoner.

Depositing the fetters with a hideous clatter, the blacksmith produced from his basket a portable anvil, which, with great care, he placed in a convenient position upon the stone floor of the vestibule.

His other implements were then produced, and laid ready to hand.

These preliminaries being over, the next proceeding was to invest Jack with his heavy irons.

In order that this might be done, it was necessary entirely to remove the other bonds by which he was secured.

This was a proceeding which Mr. Skellum viewed with the utmost trepidation.

He was fearful lest in some most mysterious and unaccountable way his prisoner should escape.

Accordingly he placed himself directly in front of Jack, and then pulled from his pocket a horse-pistol, the largeness of which was enough to make anyone shudder.

A more bloodthirsty, death-dealing looking weapon could scarcely be conceived.

"Now, Mr. Sixteen-String Jack," Skellum said, as he deliberately cocked his pistol, "I hope you see this pleasant little friend of mine. Take my word for it, it

is heavily loaded, and at this distance I can cover your brain nicely. So! You quite understand? Now, unless you permit these men to remove your present bonds, and substitute these fetters, without so much as raising a finger in resistance, I will pull the trigger and blow your brains out without the least remorse!"

There could be no mistaking the earnestness of the speaker, and at the moment he looked more like some fiend than a human creature.

These words seemed to strike the Governor dumb.

Such an interference with his authority he had never before experienced, and he could scarcely credit the reality of what had occurred.

But the attitude of Skellum left no room for doubt or incredulity.

The major's moustache seemed actually to bristle up.

"Sir," he ejaculated, hoarsely—"Mr. Skellum, or whatever you call yourself—do you know, sir, that this interference with one of my prisoners is insufferable, sir?—yes, and intolerable, sir! I repeat the word intolerable, sir! and rest assured that Major Oneyer is not the man to permit it! D—n me, no, sir!"

Mr. Skellum never moved.

"Sir," said the major, more wrathful still, and stalking towards him as he spoke—"sir, do you hear me?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then I tell you I will not suffer this."

"You cannot help yourself."

"Not help myself?"

"No, sir. Just look at that."

The major snatched from Skellum's hand a small piece of paper.

He glanced at it savagely.

"You see," said Skellum, still retaining his position, "the chief magistrate at Bow Street, acting under the direction of the Secretary of State, has thought fit to give me absolute control over the prisoner, so let us have no more fuss. If he stands quiet all will be well."

"Well, do you call it?" cried the Governor, furiously. "Let me tell you that I think it anything but well! This interference with a man who knows how to perform his duty, and one who has been an officer, is—is—yes, d—n me, sir!—is outrageous! But I know what I'll do—I'll sell out; no, no, I mean I'll resign, and have no more to do with a parcel of d—d, cowardly thief-takers!"

Mr. Skellum did not allow himself to be moved in the least by the fury of the Governor.

Just as though not a word had been uttered, he stood in the position which he had formerly taken up, for the operation of removing Jack's bonds had commenced.

As for the highwayman himself, the calmness which he manifested was only rivalled by that of Skellum.

It was by no means a comfortable thing to stand as Jack did within a couple of yards of the muzzle of a murderous-looking horse-pistol; but our old friend never moved a muscle.

But the officers were by no means so unapprehensive of the weapon, and every now and then they paused in their work to throw a glance at their superior officer, for they knew full well that in the event of the discharge of the pistol they could scarcely hope to escape very serious injury.

Finding that their prisoner continued to stand so calmly had in a short time the effect of infusing a feeling of much greater confidence into their hearts.

Their own impression was that Mr. Skellum's pistol had awed him into complete submission.

But, as we have already remarked, Jack had no intention of making any resistance at present, for he was fully conscious that it would not serve to better his condition in the least.

Still, it was not without a great inward struggle that he suffered himself to be loaded with the heavy fetters, which had been provided for his express accommodation.

The task of riveting them on was soon performed, for the blacksmith was well skilled in his duties.

"There," he said, with an air of satisfaction, as soon as he had finished, and retiring a few steps while he spoke in order that he might contemplate his handy-work, "I don't think you will get rid of that amount of jewellery so easily as some that you have been provided with. Those fetters have not been used by anyone since the time when they were used for Jonathan Wild."

Skellum did not pay any attention to this speech.

When he saw his prisoner loaded with such a mass of iron-work that it was only by an exertion of great strength that he was able to stand upright he felt satisfied.

He uncocked his pistol, and slipped it into his huge side pocket.

All the while the smith had been at work he had watched him with a keen and critical eye, and from what he had formerly seen of such matters, he felt confident that there was not one faulty place in all the irons.

The Governor's looks bespoke his inward fury, and he still stood looking on, engaged in curling the ends of his moustache.

Evidently, he now expected that Skellum would take his departure; but that individual still lingered, being most unwilling to lose sight of his important capture.

"Major," he said, at length, "I don't think you ought to be so glumish over this business. You don't know how much I have at stake in it."

The Governor did not speak.

Skellum continued:

"I have only one more favour to ask of you, and after that I will willingly take my departure. It is, that you will allow me to see the prisoner conveyed to his cell."

"Favour be d—d, sir!" returned the Governor, in a tone of voice which showed his wrath to be as great as ever. "Haven't you an infernal slip of paper, sir, that sets my authority at naught?"

Mr. Skellum said nothing further, but looked upon this last speech as granting his request.

One of the turnkeys came forward, and in respectful tones asked which cell the prisoner should occupy.

"Don't make a d—n fool of yourself by asking me!" was the major's reply. "Ask him. I wash my hands of the entire matter."

Skellum was evidently tolerably familiar with the interior of the prison of Newgate; for upon the turnkey looking towards him, he said, unhesitatingly:

"No. 54."

The man stared and looked towards the major, who, however, refused to take any notice of his glance.

"Do you hear me?" Skellum cried.

"Yes; but——"

"None of your buts to me, sirrah! No. 54, I tell you."

The turnkey hung up the bunch of keys which he had taken in his hand in readiness, and, going to the wall, took down another bunch which, judging by the mingled rust and dust that had accumulated upon them, had not been used for many a day.

Indeed, the turnkey's hesitation only arose from the fact that the series of cells of which No. 54 formed one, had never, to his knowledge, been made use of.

In fact, No. 54 was situated in a portion of the old building, and its position was much below the ordinary level of the cells.

He had, however, nothing to do but obey; so, having taken the fresh bunch of keys in hand, he led the way out of the vestibule.

A procession was immediately formed, and so arranged that Sixteen-String Jack should form the centre of it.

So great was the weight of the irons, that, added to the pain of his wound, he was scarcely able to move.

Still he was unwilling to confess as much to his foes, and staggered on in the best way he could.

The distance was great.

The corridors threaded and the steps descended seemed innumerable.

At length a door was reached which for a long time defied the powers of the officers to open it.

At length, however, it receded upon its hinges, disclosing another flight of steps—damp-shining steps.

Care had to be taken in descending these, and Jack was glad to avail himself of the proffered aid of two of the turnkeys.

At the bottom of the flight of steps a long corridor extended, the atmosphere of which was sickening and most oppressive to the lungs.

After going about half-way along it the turnkey stopped.

"This is No. 54," he said. "Wait a moment, and I will find the key."

CHAPTER MLXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK BECOMES THE INMATE OF NO. 54.

THE lamp which the turnkey carried burnt very dimly in that damp, subterranean passage, the confined atmosphere of which was most unpleasant to the lungs; and he was obliged to look very closely at the bunch of keys in order to find the one which fitted the lock of No. 54.

Skellum looked on impatiently.

Each key had attached to it a small piece of metal, on which was stamped one or two figures denoting the number of the cell to which they belonged.

"Here it is, sir," said the turnkey, at length, fixing upon one particular key. "And by the looks, I should think it has been a precious long time since it has been used."

"Never mind your thoughts," interrupted Skellum—"nobody here wants to hear them! Be quick and open the door!"

Growling out something in a suppressed voice, the man obeyed.

But it was not very easy to make the huge key turn in the wards of the ponderous lock.

At last, however, the bolt was shot back, the heavy crossbar removed, and the door pushed open.

The turnkey raised his lamp above his head, and, standing on the threshold, peeped in.

"Enter!" said Skellum. "Do you think we want to stay here all night?"

With more muttered execrations about Skellum's officiousness, the man complied with this new demand.

That he was quite right in saying a very long time must have elapsed since the cell had been used was proved by the first glance which was cast around.

The floor was covered with moist, sticky dirt, while the walls fairly shone with watery exhalations.

Huge poisonous-looking fungi grew in the dark corners, where they found a congenial soil.

The mere aspect of such a place as this was quite enough to strike a chill to the heart of the bravest man.

How much more dreadful must it then have been to contemplate a lengthened solitary sojourn in it!

In spite of the stern control which he had hitherto exercised over himself, the highwayman shuddered.

Those who were with him shuddered too, but probably the cold was the cause of the spasmodic movement.

Mr. Skellum was in no humour to linger.

He walked straight to the further end of the cell.

The floor here was rather higher than elsewhere, and the consequence was that it was not so damp and disagreeable.

The first object which attracted the prisoner's attention was a broad stone bench.

Just below this was a strong iron bar raised about three inches from the flooring, to which it was strongly secured at both ends.

If Jack had been in any doubt as to the uses to which this long iron bar was put, these doubts would soon have had an end.

Another turnkey advanced, carrying in his hand a huge padlock and key.

From Jack's waist depended some strong iron links, which were connected by means of a ring with the fetters which confined his wrists.

This again was joined by the fetters round his ankles.

The turnkey took hold of the iron ring we have mentioned and passed through it the bow of the padlock, which he afterwards clasped round the horizontal iron bar.

The key was turned and removed.

The highwayman was then considered to be a secure prisoner.

Mr. Skellum attentively watched all these proceedings with strong sensations of satisfaction.

As for Jack, he was so much exhausted, not merely with the weight of the fetters, but also with the fatigue and weakness caused by remaining so long tightly bound, that he very gladly sank upon the stone bench, offering no resistance at all to his foes.

This passiveness was the only thing that caused Skellum any anxiety.

He looked upon it as being altogether an unfavourable

symptom, and he hoped that the prison officials would not suffer themselves to be deluded by it.

The reader will comprehend that the mode in which the high-waysman was fastened allowed him a certain amount of liberty, inasmuch as he could, if he chose, walk the whole length of the iron bar, which was so constructed that the bow of the padlock could slip along it easily.

Jack at once bent his eyes upon the ground, and by his appearance seemed to be altogether unconscious of the fact that he was not alone.

When all was completed, Mr. Skellum stood for some moments looking at him.

But he could not take his departure until he had satisfied himself that Jack was secure.

He did this by making a careful examination of the fetters.

Of this also Jack seemed to be unconscious, for he never moved a muscle.

The fact was that he was in a state closely resembling insensibility.

He was too much overcome to make the slightest motion, and he was only partly conscious of what was going on around.

And when we consider what our old friend had gone through, no surprise will be felt at the helpless condition to which he was reduced.

At last Skellum signified his readiness to depart; but as he went he continued to cast anxious glances towards his prisoner.

With the closest attention he watched the turnkey secure the door, and as he walked back along the gloomy passage he said:

"Do not for one moment suffer yourselves to be deceived by the apathy of the prisoner; I am convinced that it is only assumed, and of course only with the intention of throwing you off your guard."

The turnkeys were silent, for there was not one who relished this interference with their duties.

"If you are wise you will pay attention to what I have said," continued Skellum. "The Government is determined to hang this man; and should he escape, depend upon it every one who has any share in keeping guard over him will be transported."

Still there was no reply, and this persistent silence made Skellum grind his teeth with rage.

Moodily he stalked on until the vestibule was once more reached, and then he looked around him as though he had anticipated to see the Governor.

But the major had retired.

Skellum, having no excuse for remaining longer, reluctantly took his departure.

On the pavement outside he paused, however, and assembled his men around him.

"I have no faith in the present Governor of Newgate, nor in one of the officials, so that, to counteract their carelessness, you shall form a close circle round the prison, and keep a sharp look-out upon every part of it. Perform this service well, and you shall be well rewarded. Never fear but that I will see to that."

The men separated, and Skellum retraced his steps to Bow Street.

He was now full of anxiety to learn something about the movements of those who had started off in pursuit of the remainder of the band of high-waysmen.

But on his arrival there was no intelligence, and this circumstance had the effect of filling his mind with painful doubts.

He began to think that they had not met with much success, or he would have heard of them sooner.

We fancy, however, that the reader would prefer a relation of what happened to Jack to the proceedings of the police officers, and accordingly we return to Newgate.

The Governor was a long time before he could bring his furious anger into anything like reasonable bounds.

This superseding of his authority was something which his haughty nature could not brook.

His first act was to take pen, ink, and paper as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently to do so.

In very intemperate language he then wrote out his resignation of the office he held, and concluded with the suggestion that, as so much confidence was felt in Mr. Skellum's abilities, he had better be put in his place.

This missive he immediately despatched by special messenger; and having done so, he felt much more composed than he had hitherto done.

We mention these circumstances because of the effect which they produced upon Sixteen-String Jack's condition.

Every night it was the custom of the major to make a complete round of the prison, so as to insure that all was going on as it should be.

He did not allow his passion to prevent him from making the present evening any exception to the rule.

The usual round was taken, and when he had finished he said, in surly tones:

"And where the devil, may I ask, is No. 54?"

The turnkey explained the position of the cell.

"I suppose I may be allowed to visit this cell too? But the devil burn me, if the time will not soon be here when I shall not know what to do in the prison. Lead the way, will you?" he added, to the jailer. "Don't stand there like a grinning idiot, as you are!"

The man, without a word, conducted the major to No. 54, for he knew very well that it was a most unwise proceeding to offer the choleric Governor any provocation in his present angry mood.

"And this is the place they have thought fit to put a fellow-man and a Christian in, is it?" said the major, as he paused before the door of Jack's cell. "Faugh!—bah! the stink is enough to kill a regiment of soldiers!"

The turnkey opened the door.

The grating sound caused Jack to look up.

He wondered greatly what could be the meaning of this unexpected visitor.

The Governor stalked up close to the damp, moss-grown bench on which our old friend sat.

For some moments he looked on in silence, but at last his thoughts broke forth in words.

"May I be d—d!" he ejaculated, "if this is not worse than the Black Hole at Calcutta! It's a disgrace! But," he added, with a string of oaths which we prefer to omit, "it shall never be said that Major Oneyer permitted such a state of things to exist. You may be a bad sort of a fellow, but d—n me, sir, if you shall be treated like a beast!"

Sixteen-String Jack listened to these remarks in unbounded amazement.

In vain he tried to comprehend their exact purport.

It was not long, however, before he found that the disagreement between the major and Mr. Skellum would be beneficial to himself.

"Give me the lamp," said the major, furiously; "and now go and fetch some one to help you. I will stop here and keep guard the while."

"And what is to be done, sir?" the turnkey ventured to inquire.

"Done!" echoed the major. "Why, this d—d hole shall be cleaned out, and made as comfortable as possible. Don't stare at me. It shall be done, and, harkye: order a fresh mattress to be brought and placed upon that stone bench. Why, it is damp enough to kill anyone who sat on it—and bring blankets, too, and a loaf."

The turnkey departed, anxious to communicate to his companions the extraordinary commands which he had received.

During his absence, the Governor walked up and down the cell, the fever in his mind being too great to allow him to remain still.

At the same time he occupied himself with pouring maledictions upon Skellum's head.

But as soon as Jack could recover from his astonishment he spoke:

"I don't know, sir," he said, in an unsteady voice, for the unexpected kindness of the Governor went to his heart—"I don't know why you should trouble yourself so much about my condition; but rest assured that I am deeply grateful to you for your humanity. I was always poor in expressing my thanks, but never poorer than I am at this moment."

"Never mind about that," said the Governor; "I am a soldier, and have got my own notions of what is right and wrong. It is certain that I was never cut out to be the Governor of a prison, and d—n me if I will be, and that's the truth! As for that Skinem or Killen, or whatever the blackguard's name is, I only wish I had the power to keep him in this place a week or two!"

What more the major may have said we know not, for just then the turnkey, accompanied by three others, appeared.

The men set about their task with hearty goodwill, for they knew the angry nature of the Governor; and in much less time than would perhaps have been thought possible, the cell was cleaned and made to present a widely different aspect.

A new mattress was placed upon the stone bench, and a couple of blankets were placed at the disposal of the prisoner.

Bread was brought, and also a pitcher of water.

"There, Mr. Skinem," the major ejaculated, when all his commands had been thoroughly carried out, "I have disappointed your base-hearted spite, and be d—d to you!"

These words of course let Sixteen-String Jack into the full light of the affair, and he comprehended it was the desire for revenge upon the man who had offended, more than humanity, that had induced the Governor to adopt his present course.

But this did not prevent the highwayman from expressing his gratitude for the amelioration of his condition.

In this, however, the major manifested his bluntness and honesty.

"Don't thank me," he roared, drowning Jack's voice completely. "You have nothing to thank me for."

"But I easily might have something," Jack answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, sir: I have been wounded in the leg by a bullet—somewhere near the ankle, I believe—and I should never forget your kindness if you were to send the surgeon to look at it. Your kindness has touched me, for when I entered this place I made up my mind to die rather than ask for assistance."

The major remained standing stock still for several seconds after the prisoner had finished speaking.

The first use which he made of his voice was to launch out into a volley of imprecations upon Skellum's inhumanity.

"And so you are a wounded man?" he said, at length, in a calmer voice.

"I am."

"And a brave one too," added the major. "What an infernal pity it is you did not turn soldier instead of highwayman. If you had, d—n me, sir, you would have been a credit to the country!"

The major spoke with so much emphasis as to call up a smile upon Jack's countenance.

"You shall have a surgeon in less than a quarter of an hour," he continued; "and as for the rascal Killem, I'll be even with him some day, the blackguard!"

CHAPTER MLXXXIII.

THE RESULT OF SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY.

THE Governor was as good as his word.

The surgeon came, who made an examination of Jack's hurt, which he pronounced not serious, but still in a bad state through neglect.

One dressing, however, had the effect of almost entirely relieving Jack from the smarting pain which he had suffered.

This being over, the highwayman threw himself at full length upon the hard mattress, and fell off into a profound sleep, which was solely caused by utter exhaustion.

He was awoke by hearing the fastenings of his cell door undone.

He looked up faintly and wearily.

A smile of pleasure immediately appeared upon his lips when he saw upon the threshold the young lawyer, Mr. Godfrey.

He came at once to the rude pallet and seated himself upon it.

"You have been sent by Old Matthew?" said Jack, inquiringly.

The lawyer nodded.

"My best thanks to him," answered Jack, "but he can do me no service. I feel that my race is run. I shall take the will for the deed, however. Assure him of my gratitude."

"I will, never fear. But I shall appear in your behalf

at the trial, when, rest certain, every effort will be made to get you off."

"But made in vain."

"Nay—I don't know that."

"But I do."

"You are most despondent."

"I am; for I feel that my case is hopeless."

"Nay—nay—do not begin to despair yet."

"When is the trial?"

"In two days."

"So soon?"

"Yes. I shall try to get it postponed to next sessions."

"You will not succeed."

"You must allow me to judge best about that."

"Nay—nay; believe me, I realise much better than you do the exact nature of my position."

"You may think so."

"I am certain of it. I am in the toils, and I have set the authorities too long at defiance to indulge in any hope of getting off."

"You will think differently soon."

Jack shook his head.

"I am not surprised at your dejection; this place is enough to give anyone the horrors."

"Right—but what did you think of doing for me at the trial?"

"Getting up an alibi."

"Wou'd do."

"We shall see about that," said Mr. Godfrey, smiling.

"I have had some little experience in these matters."

"And you really hope to succeed?"

"I do, because I shall bring witnesses forward to prove you were elsewhere."

"It will be useless."

"It will be done, nevertheless."

"Have you heard anything of my friends?"

"Nothing."

"There has been no fresh capture made?"

"I believe not."

"Then I have hopes for them. And now I wish you to pay the utmost attention to something I am going to say to you."

"I shall do so, never fear," answered Mr. Godfrey, taking out his note-book.

"Nay, it is nothing you have occasion to write down—merely listen."

"I will."

"About the trial, then, I have no doubts. I know full well how that will terminate."

"But—"

"Nay, no interruptions. After it is over I believe that my comrades will endeavour to rescue me, and will doubtless put themselves into communication with Old Matthew before doing so."

"Well?"

"Should they do so, take to them from me the assurance that it is my earnest desire that they will attempt nothing of the kind—"

"But stay—"

"Hush! The attempt cannot benefit me, for it will fail; and as for my comrades, they will perish."

"Really," cried Mr. Godfrey, "you take too gloomy a view of things, and you will not allow me to interpose a word."

"Promise me," continued Jack, unheeding of the interruption—"promise me that you will faithfully deliver this message. It is my last request, and I shall suffer much if it is not granted."

"You may depend that I will report all that you say. At the same time, endeavour to assume a little cheerfulness. Every effort will be made for you—"

"I know all about that, and I am deeply thankful to you all. But what I have seen since I have been an inmate of this prison convinces me that the Government will never allow me to slip through their fingers this time; the precautions taken are extraordinary."

"Still that ought not to make you despair."

"Why?"

"Because the race is not always to the swift, you know, and therefore it is possible for these extra precautions to defeat themselves."

"It may be so, but it is a frail hope indeed."

"Still it is a hope; and now let me give you one word of parting counsel, for the time allotted for my interview

has almost expired. When you are brought up, plead not guilty, and leave the rest to me. I promise you to open your mouth."

"I promise that readily."

"Enough. I must now bid you farewell."

In fact, it was at this moment that the turkey who has been standing near the door came towards them and gruffly announced:

"Time's up."

With a few more words of encouragement the young lawyer departed, and Jack was once more left to the solitude of his cell.

The visit, however, caused rather an increase than an abatement of Jack's despair.

A deep gloom seemed gradually settling upon his spirits.

It was because his heart was oppressed by a heavy presentiment.

An inward voice seemed perpetually to assure him that he had seen his faithful comrades for the last time, and that the duration of his life upon this earth would now be short indeed.

To what extent these dismal forebodings were correct, time now will very quickly show.

After the interview we have just recorded, nothing took place to disturb the monotony of existence that was of a character sufficiently important to merit particular consideration at our hands.

The two days mentioned by Mr. Godfrey as intervening between the one appointed for his trial quickly passed away.

The eventful morning came.

It found Sixteen-String Jack quite calm and composed.

He was like one who knows the worst—not like one enduring the liveliest suspense.

It was evident that the authorities were apprehensive that a rescue would be attempted, and therefore every conceivable precaution was adopted.

Jack's fetters weighed heavily upon him, preventing him from taking that amount of repose which his exhausted condition required.

Consequently it was with satisfaction that he looked forward to the commencement of his trial, because during it he fully expected to be relieved from the ponderous mass of iron.

But this expectation was doomed to disappointment.

To his unbounded astonishment, he was informed that it had been determined to place him in the dock with his fetters still upon him.

Jack uttered no word of remonstrance, because he knew full well that it would be unavailing.

But he looked upon this circumstance as a strong confirmation of his gloomy anticipations.

It was determined that he should perish.

His trial would be a mere idle form—an utter mockery.

He felt that he was foredoomed, and knew that the verdict and sentence were already decided.

It was, however, quite an unexpected thing for any prisoner to be placed at the bar while encumbered with his fetters, and a murmur of astonishment, not to say indignation, made itself heard as soon as the highwayman was brought into Court.

But this manifestation was speedily checked, for the spectators felt that they were only there out of sufferance, and that any misbehaviour would result in immediate expulsion.

Some compassion was, however, displayed for Jack's state of weakness, and, by the order of the presiding judge, he was provided with a chair.

Into this Jack sank gladly, and prepared to listen to what was about to take place, though with a strengthened consciousness of what the result would be.

The usual formalities attendant upon the opening of the Court were then gone through.

The jury were sworn, and the indictment against the prisoner read.

Stripped of all its confusing technicalities and needless repetitions, the substance was that at a certain time and place the prisoner at the bar did stop on the highway two of his Majesty's subjects, whom, after putting them in great fear of their lives, he despoiled of a large sum of money.

In accordance with the instructions given him, Jack, when called upon, pleaded "Not guilty."

Mr. Godfrey then rose.

"My lord," he said, "I beg to state that the prisoner is unprepared with his defence. It is now only three days since his examination, and the time has not been sufficient for the obtaining of the witnesses who will declare his innocence. For this reason I have to request that the trial be postponed until the next sessions, by which time the prisoner will be prepared."

No sooner had the last words left the young lawyer's lips than the counsel for the prosecution sprang to his feet.

"My lord," he said, "I beg to oppose the application of my learned friend. I maintain that sufficient time has elapsed in order to enable the prisoner to arrange his defence. Moreover, as I need not inform your lordship, the prisoner is one of a notorious band of desperadoes who have long set the authorities at defiance. With great difficulty this one has been captured, and any postponement of his trial would only afford facilities for his escape."

"Without taking the latter into consideration at all," replied the judge, "I deem the former objection quite valid. Sufficient time has elapsed, and the trial must now proceed."

This was Mr. Godfrey's first discomfiture.

But he had expected it, and, therefore, suffered but little disappointment.

His next effort was to rid Jack of his fetters.

"I bow to your decision, my lord, but I have yet another request to make. You see that the prisoner at the bar is loaded with fetters of such an enormous weight that it is quite wonderful how he sustains himself in them. My request is that, during the examination which is about to take place, the fetters be removed."

"My lord," interposed the counsel for the prosecution, "I must also oppose this application. We have good reason for believing that an attempt will be made to rescue the prisoner from custody, and therefore it has been deemed advisable to depart from the usual course, and cause the prisoner to appear before you as you see him."

The judge inclined his head.

"I consider the reason given by my learned friend for the prosecution quite sufficient," he said, "and I cannot make any interference."

Mr. Godfrey looked really disappointed this time, for he had quite calculated on carrying this point.

Those in the Court exchanged whispers with each other.

The general impression was that Jack's fate was sealed.

No very far-sighted person was required to see that the prosecution would have it all their own way, and that so far as the ultimate result was concerned, all the debates of the trial might as well be dispensed with.

The counsel for the prosecution now again rose.

Amid a breathless silence he commenced his address.

In a very circumstantial manner he related how the two bailiffs had been robbed on the high-road by Sixteen-String Jack.

As all the particulars of this adventure must be fresh in the minds of the reader, it is needless for us to report his speech in full.

His concluding words, however, may as well be put on record.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said,—"this is a brief statement of the facts of the case against the prisoner. Witnesses will now be called who will depose to all the circumstances; and, having heard this evidence, it will be for you, gentlemen of the jury, to decide whether the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not. If the former, do not hesitate to pronounce your verdict, because it is only by making an example of such a man as the prisoner at the bar that we can hope to restore something like safety to his Majesty's subjects while travelling. The state of our high-roads has long been a disgrace to the whole land, and therefore, gentlemen of the jury, you will be able to see that your duty is more than ordinarily important upon the present occasion."

These last words were considered so unfair and so prejudicial that they were greeted with a general hiss from the body of the Court.

A scene of great confusion then ensued, and it was some moments before order could be restored.

In the meanwhile one of the witnesses had been placed in the box.

It was one of the bailiffs.

As soon as he had been sworn, he gave a very clear and truthful account of the manner in which he had been robbed.

He swore positively that Sixteen-String Jack was one of his assailants, and added over and over again, with great emphasis, that he could not possibly be mistaken in the matter.

Mr. Godfrey subjected him to a very close and searching cross-examination.

It was all to no purpose, however.

The man kept pertinaciously to his tale.

The other bailiff gave corroborative evidence, and then a whole army of police officers and other persons were marshalled successively into the witness-box.

They were called by the prosecution, and with the sole object of identifying the prisoner.

Every one swore most positively that the prisoner at the bar was no other than the famous highwayman, Sixteen-String Jack.

The bill offering the reward was then handed in.

Upon this, as the reader knows, was printed a description of Jack's appearance.

This was found to tally in every respect, so that the question of identification seemed settled beyond all possibility of doubt.

The evidence was overwhelming; but yet Mr. Godfrey did not despair.

He had his witnesses well and carefully instructed, and now he proceeded to call them.

Their evidence was that the prisoner at the bar was not Sixteen-String Jack, but a person who unfortunately bore a strong resemblance to him, and that at the time mentioned as that when the robbery was committed, he was many miles from the place.

The Old Bailey has long had an infamous notoriety for hard swearing, and surely never was harder swearing known than on the present occasion.

To the uninitiated it would have appeared difficult to come to a decision in the face of so much opposite and conflicting testimony.

But the jury, when the time came for them to deliberate upon their verdict, did not so much as turn round in their seats.

Their minds were quite made up, and when the Clerk of the Arraigns put to them the usual question, the foreman replied:

"Guilty."

CHAPTER MLXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MEETS WITH AN INTERRUPTION ON HIS WAY TO TYBURN.

FROM what has already been said, the verdict found by the jury will occasion no surprise to the reader.

Jack himself never moved a muscle when the fatal declaration was made.

Many who watched him marvelled at his coolness; but they did not think that for many hours he had exclusively occupied himself in preparing his mind for this result.

The usual question was put by the Clerk of the Arraigns as to whether the prisoner had anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him in accordance with the verdict which had just been found.

Jack shook his head.

Like the rest of the proceedings on this day, the question was a form merely, for, without waiting a second after the clerk had finished speaking, the judge commenced to pass sentence.

Already he had assumed the hideous black cap which is supposed in some mysterious manner to impart additional solemnity to what is said.

The judge spoke in very low, subdued tones, yet so intense was the silence which now prevailed in the Court that there was no syllable experienced by anyone present in hearing every syllable.

Before pronouncing the last awful words, the judge, as is customary in such cases, made some prefatory remarks, the tenor of which was the enormity of the offence of which the prisoner had been found guilty.

Then he concluded

"The sentence of this Court upon you is that you be taken hence to the prison whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and may Heaven show you that mercy which the laws of this land will not permit us to display."

A kind of shudder seemed to run through the whole Court when the judge finished, as though the crowded assemblage had been possessed of but one body.

It was impossible that Jack could listen to these awful words unmoved.

Had he done so he could scarcely have been human.

He was aroused by feeling a tap upon his shoulder.

He looked round, and saw that the officers were waiting to conduct him to the cell.

He prepared to rise, but before doing so, made a sign which brought Mr. Godfrey to the front of the dock.

"You see I was right," said Jack, calmly. "Now remember to impress upon Old Matthew that it is my earnest desire that he pays strict regard to my last wishes."

Just as he spoke, Matthew himself pushed forward, and before anyone was aware of what he was about to do, he seized Jack's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Keep up your courage," he said, in a faint whisper.

"Good-bye, old friend," responded Jack, in a broken voice, and returning the friendly pressure while he spoke—"good-bye, though you ought not to have endangered yourself by thus publicly recognising me."

"Leave that to me. They can't make it a criminal act to shake hands; and as for the public-house, I have made up my mind to give that up and retire."

The officers now interposed and prevented any further conversation.

Jack was much pleased at being thus recognised, and he felt that it would enable him to pass through the ordeal which awaited him.

Upon reaching the room beneath the dock he found that Tom Davis with his wife and Ellen were among the inmates.

Fain would he have lingered and addressed to them a few last words.

But his jailers would not permit him to pause a single moment.

All he could do was to bestow upon them a brief parting glance.

The next moment the closing of the heavy door hid them from his sight.

The case against Tom Davis was the next one on the list, and accordingly they were summoned to the Court above.

Mrs. Davis was still in a condition of most deplorable weakness and exhaustion.

So faint was she, that she was allowed to seat herself upon the chair which had been so lately occupied by Sixteen-String Jack.

In accordance with the advice of Mr. Godfrey, all three of the prisoners pleaded "Not guilty."

Tom Davis was taken separately.

The charge against him was not only having been an accomplice of the band of highwaymen, but also with being an escaped convict.

In spite of an eloquent speech from Mr. Godfrey wherein he entreated the mercy of the Court, the judge sentenced him to transportation for life.

Ellen and Mrs. Davis were then separately charged with aiding and abetting felons.

The young lawyer contended that there was no direct evidence against them.

But the Court looked at the former conviction for the same offence, and sentenced them both to imprisonment with hard labour for the space of two years.

If outward appearance could be taken as any indication, then it was tolerably clear that Mrs. Davis would end her days within the walls of a prison.

The scene which followed when the moment came for the separation was heartrending.

So painful was it that we feel ourselves compelled to pass over it in silence.

All three knew that it was a lifelong separation that was to follow.

Mrs. Davis did not long survive the shock.

She died before the time came for her removal from Newgate.

As for Jack, he had resolved to try his best to meet his coming fate with fortitude.

He had played a game of which Death was the stake.

He knew that some day or other there must be an end to his career, and he was conscious that it had come at last.

There was only one point upon which he suffered anxiety.

This was the fear he had that his other comrades would make some desperate attempt to rescue him.

From the precautions that had been taken, Jack was absolutely certain that the result could be nothing but defeat—and defeat to the highwaymen meant nothing but death.

The attempt, so far from benefiting him, would only have the effect of consigning them to that fate from which he felt he could not possibly escape.

As it was, Jack felt that it would be no inconsiderable satisfaction if he could die knowing that his companions were safe.

But he feared, and with good reason, that his comrades would freely die in the attempt to save him.

He was doubtful, too, whether his urgently-made request would have any effect upon them.

Judging by himself, he knew that it would make no impression upon him were he in their place.

It may safely be said that this topic occupied his thoughts much more than any other; and in the long, dark, and silent hours of the night he would listen with feverish impatience, expecting to hear something that would give token of the approach of his comrades, and starting nervously when any faint sound floated to his ears.

There were only four days standing between the one upon which he had taken his trial and that fatal Monday upon which, for fifty-two times every year, so many trembling human beings were offered up as sacrifices to the majesty of outraged law.

Short as the time was in reality, yet it seemed very long to Jack, who had nothing to occupy him save his own sad thoughts, and nothing to break the dismal monotony of his cell.

When Sunday came, he fully expected that he would have to pass through what was to him infinitely the most painful of all—that of sitting in the chapel while the Ordinary of Newgate preached a funeral sermon.

But so great were the apprehensions felt about the safety of the prisoner that it was determined to do away with the customary ceremony.

Great, therefore, was the disappointment of those who could find no better Sabbath occupation than that of flocking to the prison chapel, in order that they might gratify their morbid curiosity for gazing upon men so soon about to die.

But with Sixteen-String Jack absent, the show was shorn of half its attractions.

As for the condemned man himself, he felt deeply grateful for his escape.

The Ordinary visited him in his cell; but Jack could not fix his attention sufficiently to understand what he said.

He was wondering all the time what his companions were about; and though he would firmly have denied that such was the case, yet in his inmost heart he experienced something akin to disappointment at having heard nothing of them.

It seemed so like deserting him; and nothing could have caused Jack half so keen a pang as the thought that he was neglected by those whom he had over thought his best and dearest friends.

Whenever this thought occurred to him he dismissed it with angry impatience; yet, for all that, it continued to return over and over again.

Each repetition, too, seemed to be stronger and stronger, and Jack's dejection much increased.

And so passed on the time until the evening came preceding the morning which had been fixed for his execution.

And now there was deeply impressed upon Jack's mind the consciousness that his end was close at hand.

No effort of his own, no exertions of his friends, would serve to avert his doom.

If no time had arrived when he was destined to take his parting look of this bright world.

Then, when the hour of midnight approached, a low and distant roar, like that arising from the sea when heard from afar off, came upon his ears.

At first he wondered what it could be that produced it.

He listened attentively for a few moments

Then he resumed his former attitude.

"I know well enough now what it is," he murmured.

"It is the crowd—the gaping crowd already taking up their position in order to obtain a glimpse of the bold highwayman they have so often heard of, and to note how he looks upon his first setting out upon his journey to certain death.

"But they will be disappointed," he added, after a brief pause—"that is, if they expect to see me exhibit any great signs of emotion. I will so school myself that, no matter what feelings there may be about my heart, they shall not find expression in my countenance; no, no—that shall be a blank to them."

After the utterance of this determination, a kind of stupor seemed to creep over the highwayman's faculties.

It was not sleep, nor was it a swoon, although he was all but unconscious of everything around him.

It was rather an anomalous condition produced by want of sleep and by a terrible exhaustion.

How long he remained thus Jack had no very clear conception.

He was aroused by a touch and by the sound of voices.

Looking up, he saw himself face to face with a turnkey.

"You're a tight one, you are!" he exclaimed, with a certain kind of admiration. "Let me tell you it is very few we have to awaken at such a time as this. However, I see you mean to die game. What will you have for breakfast?"

It cost Jack a great effort to control his inclination to shudder.

"What you like," he said—"anything, so long as you leave me to myself."

A meal was brought, which constituted only the ordinary prison fare.

But Jack did not taste it.

Then came the usual visit from the officials connected with the prison.

Jack submitted to everything mechanically.

The only sign of consciousness he gave was a deep sigh of relief at the moment when his heavy irons were struck off.

He felt then as though he was almost a free man.

His jailers were on the alert, fancying perhaps the prisoner would choose the present moment for making some insane resistance.

But they were deceived.

Jack was as calm as ever.

He was then conducted to the press-yard, and upon reaching this place he inspired gratefully the fresh, cool morning air—fresh in comparison with the damp, malarious exhalations of his dungeon.

Here the hangman was in waiting, and here he was pinioned again, though in a different fashion than before.

Afterwards he was half-led, half-carried into a kind of courtyard.

This place was crowded to the utmost of its capacity by police officers.

Jack had wondered greatly how it was he had seen nothing of Skellum on this eventful morning.

The fact was that the individual just mentioned had been extremely busy in posting his men along the line of route, and taking every precaution to prevent the possibility of a rescue.

Strange rumours had been floating about the country to the effect that a desperate attack would be made while the highwayman was on his way to Tyburn, and in consequence Skellum had taken such measures as would, he felt convinced, make any such attempt futile.

Some little delay took place before all was in readiness for a start.

At length, however, Jack was lifted up into the cart and forced to take a seat upon the hideous black-and-white coffin which was destined for the reception of his body after death.



[THE END OF CLAUDE DUVAL'S DEVOTED FRIENDSHIP.]

The Ordinary placed himself by his side.

The hangman mounted to a seat in front.

Under the direction of Mr. Skellum a dense body of police officers then surrounded the vehicle.

The sheriffs had by this time seated themselves comfortably in the gaudy carriage provided for their use.

Outside the large folding doors a troop of light dragoons were stationed, who for some hours past had had no small difficulty in keeping the populace at a respectful distance.

The signal for starting was given by the irascible Governor of the prison.

Scarcely had the sound died away than the folding doors were thrown open, and the first portion of the procession set itself in motion.

As it slowly defiled into the Old Bailey the assembled multitude set up loud cheers and other cries.

No. 232. — BLACK BESS.

A fearful succession of groans proclaimed the moment when the executioner was caught sight of.

These changed again into cheers as the highwayman himself came into view.

Mr. Skellum heard the sounds with dismay.

To his ears they seemed to mean rescue.

He by no means liked the extreme resignation which Sixteen-String Jack manifested.

He inferred from it that something was going to happen.

"Keep close around him, my lads," Skellum said. "Be on the watch, and above all things don't suffer yourselves to be so much thrown off your guard as to be taken by surprise."

When the heavy vehicle passed out into the open street, Sixteen-String Jack raised his head and looked keenly around him.

But the multitude of faces which he beheld bewildered and confused him.

It was in vain for him to hope to distinguish one familiar and friendly face out of so many.

A half-repressed sigh of disappointment escaped his lips, and then he resumed his former manner.

Mr. Skellum knew not what to make of this, although he watched the condemned man's every movement, and tried his best to read his thoughts.

The troop of soldiers brought up the rear of the procession.

All carried their swords drawn, so as to have them in readiness for use at a moment's notice.

Skinner Street and Snow Hill were passed in safety—the Fleet bridge crossed and the ascent of Holborn Hill commenced.

Here it was customary to make a halt, and this would be the moment chosen most likely for an attempt at rescue.

Accordingly Mr. Skellum concentrated his forces at this point, and kept a more than ever vigilant look-out.

But the people, beyond shouting, screaming, and swaying to and fro, did not seem inclined to make any demonstration.

As soon as possible, the word was given for the journey to be recommenced.

By this time Sixteen-String Jack began to realise how unawares he had suffered hope to hold possession of a portion of his heart.

When near the gates of St. Andrew's Church, he had indeed looked wistfully and expectantly around.

At this point he made sure of seeing something that would convince him he was not neglected and forgotten by his friends.

The disappointment made itself felt most keenly.

At the same snail-like pace the procession resumed its course.

Holborn was slowly passed through from one end to the other, and the High Street of St. Giles's reached.

Here again it was customary to stop.

The landlord came out with the bowl of punch, which it was then the rule to offer to the prisoner by way of refreshment.

Jack took it as well as his pinioned arms would let him, because it afforded him a pretext for standing upon the cart.

In this position he was able to see all around him.

There were on all sides as far as his eyes could reach nothing—nothing but white faces all upturned towards him—all staring at him.

Skellum was full of excitement.

The multitude was silent—strangely and awfully silent when the vastness of it was taken into consideration and the noise which had hitherto attended it.

Jack remained thus for some moments, looking eagerly around.

Then, with a weary sigh, he returned the bowl of punch untasted, and sat down on the coffin.

This was the signal for the commencement of the former turbulence.

The silence of the people had arisen solely from the notion that Jack was about to address them, it being no unusual thing for a prisoner to make a speech when at this spot.

Now they were loud in their expressions of disappointment.

Again the procession started.

It would be hard to say, however, whether Mr. Skellum's fears were to any extent abated.

He was still a prey to great anxiety.

Jack now gave himself over to greater despondency than ever.

He felt that he was abandoned by all his friends, and the thought sent a bitter pang to his heart.

He was deserted.

And then again he would think that all that was going on around him was nothing else save some hideous dream.

In a short time he fancied he must awake to find all that which was now seemingly so real nothing but baseless unsubstantiality.

He thought, too, as he grew a little calmer, that it was most probable that all his comrades were in positions of danger scarcely inferior to his own, and such being the

case, how unreasonable it was of him to look for their presence.

He resolved to think of them no longer, but to bend all his energies to the one task that lay before him—that of dying bravely.

When he again raised his eyes, he felt that present occurrences were indeed no vision, for before him he could see the dark timbers of Tyburn Tree.

It was just, however, at this moment that he became conscious that something of an unusual character was going on near him.

CHAPTER MLXXV.

TAKES A GLIMPSE AT THE FORTUNES OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

THIS something clearly caused a considerable amount of confusion, but what it precisely was we must go back a little way to explain.

It is with the proceedings of Claude Duval that we are now about to concern ourselves, and we revert to the moment when he broke away from the police officers at Stonehenge.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that so many firearms could be discharged without producing serious results.

We have seen already that Sixteen-String Jack, Dick Turpin, and Maud were more or less severely injured, and Claude Duval did not escape.

Indeed, he was wounded in no less than three places and all the hurts were serious ones.

Nevertheless, he was not incapacitated from retaining his seat in the saddle; it would indeed be a serious wound to cause him to fall, for to him riding could only be called second nature.

Away, then, he went across the broad expanse of Salisbury Plain, urging his horse by every means at his command to put forth his utmost speed.

In a moment both horse and rider seemed to be swallowed up by the intense darkness which reigned around.

Claude was in too much haste, and too much bewildered by the events which had recently occurred, to take any notice of the direction his horse was taking.

Indeed, to him just then all roads were the same.

His only object was to get out of the way of his pursuers.

The separation of the highwaymen in the manner we have previously described really was the best course they could have adopted, since the officers were much embarrassed by it.

Of course they divided all their forces so as to give chase to all the fugitives; but then they could not part themselves into various small troops without a little confusion and several moments' delay.

Claude, however, in spite of his exertions, was not able to get out of hearing of his foes.

Every now and then the wind would carry to him the dull, heavy sound produced by the concussion of many horses' hoofs upon the ground.

Whip, spur, and voice were all employed by Claude in his exertions to urge his steed forward at his utmost speed, and certainly the animal responded nobly.

It seemed an awful thing to be rushing at so tremendous a speed through the intense darkness.

He had to trust entirely to the sagacity of his horse to keep clear of any obstacle that might lay before them.

Away, away they sped in mad career, and surely at a more rapid pace than the more heavily-mounted police officers would be able to make.

But as Claude continued to call out in inspiring tones to his steed, his voice grew weaker and weaker, until at last it became inaudible to himself.

Still he paused not, nor relaxed those efforts he was able to make.

The darkness seemed to roll around him in huge and palpable masses.

He rocked to and fro in the saddle, maintaining his balance only by a species of instinct.

His pursuers were out of hearing now, but Claude knew it not.

On the contrary, his exciting fancy made him believe that they were still hard upon his track—that the hoofs of their horses were thundering in his ears.

The margin of Salisbury Plain was reached, and the wooded country beyond gained.

Of this, also, was Claude ignorant.

His sole consciousness extended only to the fact that his horse was carrying him along at a furious rate, and even the sense of this grew less and less distinct every moment.

Had it been possible for any person to watch his headlong course, the utmost apprehensions would have been excited.

Every now and then it seemed as though he must inevitably be dashed to pieces.

Yet, strangely enough, he held on—held on until all became a blank.

There seemed to be a rushing sound in his ears, a mist of light before his eyes, and then all was silence and utter darkness.

Claude had swooned.

The quantity of blood he had lost was prodigious; but he did not fall from his horse until he was totally insensible.

Fortunately, just at this moment the horse was making his way across a piece of soft open ground.

On this Claude fell without injuring himself.

Falling, his feet became disentangled from the stirrups, and the horse, half maddened with terror and the manner in which he had been ridden, continued his race with undiminished speed.

He was out of sight in a moment.

Claude lay quite still—quite helpless; and had his pursuers come in that direction they would have made an easy capture.

It seemed to Claude that only a moment elapsed after his fall from his horse until he opened his eyes again.

But this was a delusion.

Contrary to his idea, many hours had passed away.

In a dreamy, semi-conscious fashion, Claude remained upon the ground, not feeling himself able to command his will sufficiently to enable him to make the slightest movement.

It was daylight.

Whether he was really aware of the circumstance is very doubtful.

At any rate, he took no notice of it.

The early morning sun had attained a considerable elevation, and his warm, rosy beams fell gratefully upon the wounded highwayman, warming his chilled limbs once more into life.

He might have remained thus for an hour, or even more, when he became conscious of something else.

This was a sound.

He listened, wondering vaguely what it was.

"It is a voice," he murmured. "Some one is singing. What a sweet and beautiful voice! Surely it must be a child's."

And then Claude relapsed into his former state—that state which was more like insensibility than life.

The voice continued singing.

It was, in truth, a sweet one.

The tones were most entrancing to the ear, and the notes were warbled forth as they might have been by some beautiful song bird.

Claude listened with intense delight.

Never before had his ears been ravished with so much melody.

As he then felt, he could have been content to remain listening for ever.

But the beautiful sounds suddenly ceased.

A shrill shriek followed, and this cry seemed to have the effect of rousing Claude partially into life.

Through his half-opened eyes he could now see the singer.

As he expected, it proved to be a young girl, who was as lovely as the sunshine of that bright morning.

The cry of alarm had been brought to her lips by coming unexpectedly upon the prostrate body of Claude Duval.

Well might her tender heart be filled with terror, for the highwayman presented a sad spectacle.

His apparel was almost everywhere soaked in blood, his hair was matted, and his face seemed to wear upon it the pallid hue of death.

The little girl carried a basket on her arm, and, true, in her extreme fright, she allowed to fall to the ground.

Another moment and she would have fled precipitately from the spot, but, fortunately, just then Claude recovered the mastery of himself so as to be able to call out in a low, weak voice.

This sound reached the girl's ears and arrested her attention.

"Help!" said Claude—"help me! Don't run away! You have nothing to fear. Mercy—mercy! Help me!"

While speaking he, by a sudden effort, raised himself a little.

At first all objects spun round him so swiftly that he could distinguish nothing.

Then his vision cleared, and he perceived the little girl standing near him with her hands clasped and her eyes suffused with tears.

Traces of alarm were still distinguishable upon her countenance.

"You have no cause for fear," the highwayman continued. "If I had the will to injure anything so beautiful I have not the power. I am weak, helpless—I fear dying."

And, in fact, just at this instant such a deadly sensation of faintness came over him as justified him in thinking that his end was near.

But the young girl now showed that she was worthy of the name of heroine.

Her first fears had now quite vanished, and she came nearer in order to see whether she could not be of some assistance.

She shrunk back a little when a closer view made her more fully acquainted with Claude's terrible condition, but she overcame the weakness almost immediately.

"Shall I fetch you some water, sir?" she asked, in a gentle voice.

Claude made an affirmative sign.

He was too far gone to speak.

The girl ran to her basket, in which she seemed to have various kinds of provisions.

Her search was for a large cup, with which she ran to a spring close by and returned with a good draught of clear cold water.

Claude drank it eagerly, and the effects were almost magical.

The fever about his eyes and brain was lulled, and a fresh vigour seemed to be imparted to his limbs.

"Thanks—many thanks!" he said. "Would that I could tell you how deeply grateful I am!"

"But how came you thus?" the girl asked, in accents of great curiosity. "You are wounded, and your clothes are stained with blood."

"Yes—yes."

"How is it?"

"You shall know all in good time—I am too weak now."

"Yes—yes; how wrong and thoughtless it was of me to ask you."

"Nay—nay; it was no more than natural. May I ask you to increase still further the obligation I owe to you?"

"In what way can I aid you, sir?"

"With a little of your help," replied Claude, in a stronger voice. "I fancy I shall be able to rise to my feet."

The girl anxiously proffered the required assistance.

But Claude found the effort to rise much more severe than he had anticipated.

At last, when he was erect, the girl had to support almost all his weight, or he would have fallen back again quite helpless.

But this was produced mainly by the change of position, and the sensation quickly died away.

"Alas! sir," said the young girl, with mingled pity and distress—"alas! sir, what will you do? Where can you go in your condition?"

"Heaven help me!"

"Come, sir, be of good heart. If I might make so bold as to offer you a shelter—"

"A shelter?"

"Yes. If you will look yonder, across the moor, you will see a little thatched cottage—it is a humble place, but my home."

Claude strained his weak and weary eyes in the endeavour to make out the building of which his fair companion spoke.

Dimly and imperfectly he could see something in the shape of a pretty rustic cottage.

"And you would be willing to give me shelter there?" he said, inquiringly.

"If you would accept of it."

"I shall do so, gladly."

"Then try if you can walk—do not hurry—and do not be afraid to bear upon me, for I am young and strong. We are poor—my mother and myself—and we are quite alone in the world, but still, what we can do for you shall be done willingly."

Claude was too much overcome by his feelings to utter a single word.

This young girl's behaviour touched him deeply

Oh, how glad he was to avail himself of this unexpected offer of shelter!

To his yearning spirit the little cottage seemed as the desert oasis to the parched and wearied traveller.

He made an effort to rally his remaining strength.

The task of walking was, however, almost beyond his powers, and often and often was he compelled to pause and recover himself.

But the young girl was all patience.

Instead of chiding his delay, she did her best to cheer his drooping spirits and revive his failing hopes.

"There, sir," she said at length, "your long and tiresome walk is over now. Here is our little garden-gate; and, look! there is mother in the porch, looking and wondering who it is that I have brought with me. Cheer up, sir—do cheer up! A few more steps, and then you are welcome to rest as long as you think proper."

Claude tried to murmur some words of thanks, but his voice choked him.

CHAPTER MLXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL IS NOT SUFFERED TO ENJOY A LONG PERIOD OF REST.

"Look, mother," said the young girl, as she passed through the little garden gate—"I found this poor gentleman lying dangerously hurt upon the moor, and I have offered him shelter."

"Right, Alice," Claude heard a voice say, in kindly accents.

"You need not shrink from your trouble," said Claude, faintly, "for I have the means about me to—to reward you well for what you do."

"We are Christians," was the answer, "and—"

What more was said Claude knew not.

He had been able to keep up thus far, but now his strength utterly deserted him.

A mist came before his eyes, and he was conscious of nothing further.

When he regained possession of his senses, he found himself in a small but comfortably-furnished bed-chamber.

The blind had been drawn down to shut out the too-glaring rays of the sun, and over all there was such an air of calmness and peacefulness as made Claude think how enviable was the lot of those who were born to spend their lives amid such a scene.

The window was a little way open, and the hum of the busy insects without and the melody of the feathered songsters of the air reached the ears of the wounded man distinctly.

These sounds contributed much to make him inclined for rest, and insensibly his eyes closed in sleep.

The slumber was long and deep, and consequently refreshing.

When Claude awoke, he felt like a new man.

Still he was in a terrible state of weakness.

He now discovered that either during his insensibility or his sleep his wounds had been skillfully bound up.

He wondered by whom, and with an inward shudder thought of the risk of detection he had run.

Indeed, he was greatly surprised that he had heard nothing of the officers, whom he fancied were close upon his track.

Apparently, however, he had eluded them.

In this way three days passed, during which the most important intelligence which reached the highwayman was that he was indebted to the good woman of the house for the care she had bestowed upon his hurts.

She explained to him that the portion of the country in which they were was so remote from other habitations that they were compelled to rely upon themselves for everything; and as she possessed a little surgical skill, she had thought it best to attend to his wounds at once, instead of waiting for assistance to arrive.

Claude thanked her earnestly, and complimented her upon the skillfulness she had displayed.

Each hour saw Claude stronger, and it was on the fourth day that for the first time he rose and dressed himself.

The woman, in the meantime, had cleaned and repaired his apparel, so that, when attired, Claude looked something like himself.

His weakness, however, was extreme, and towards evening he was compelled to throw himself at full length on the bed for rest.

Here he remained pondering deeply upon his position, and wondering what had become of his companions.

Especially was he anxious about his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack, whom he had left in so much peril.

Now that he came to think more calmly over the matter, he regretted that he had consented to leave him in the hands of his foes without making an effort to release him.

That regret now was vain, and the consciousness of this chafed him terribly.

The longer he remained in reflection the more anxious he became, until the blood in his veins rose to fever-heat.

To remain longer in the cottage he felt would be impossible.

Just then he heard a faint sound in the outer room.

He listened, and found it had been caused by the return of the young girl to whom unquestionably he owed his life, and who had been absent nearly all the day.

"Oh, mother," Claude heard her say, in cheerful tones, "you know you thought it strange that no inquiries should have been made for the poor gentleman in the next room? Well, I met with a friend of his in the town."

Claude's heart gave a great bound.

Could it be possible that his companions were at hand?

But the next words that the young girl artlessly uttered undeceived him.

"It was a man who wore a large red waistcoat—I never saw such a one before, and it made him look so strange. I heard him speaking to several others near the market-place, asking very particularly for some gentleman, who I found, from the description, must be no other than the one I found wounded on the moor."

"And did you tell the man in the red waistcoat so?"

"Yes."

Claude sprang up in bed like one suddenly galvanised.

"I quite expected to find him," the girl continued, "for he told me he should come at once. But he will be here in a moment or two at the farthest, I am sure; I will run to the door and see whether he is coming."

Here was startling intelligence indeed.

By an extraordinary accident the police had got upon his track.

He had been most innocently betrayed by the young girl.

What was to be done?

The danger was imminent indeed.

Yet how was Claude to escape it?

The mere exertion of moving about a little during the day had so much exhausted him that he was compelled to rest.

How, then, was he to hope for the power of making such efforts as would enable him to get away from his foes?

It is wonderful what a spur extreme danger is.

Claude was an exemplification of it.

Without indeed thinking for a moment of what he was about, he slipped off the bed on to the floor.

For a second he felt dizzy and sick, but the sensation speedily passed away.

It was now so dusk that he could scarcely discern the different objects the room contained, but he had often noticed that there was hanging up behind the door a cloak such as might be worn by a mounted soldier.

This Claude did not hesitate to appropriate to his own use.

At the same moment he shot the bolt softly into its socket.

This was the only fastening the door had: but slight as was its character, Claude thought that it would delay his foes at least a moment, and to him even so brief a space of time as that was of inestimable value.

Then he stepped towards the window.

So absorbed was he in what he was about that his weakness was for the time forgotten.

The room in which he had slept was level with the ground.

He looked keenly through the little panes, but in the gathering gloom he could discern no one.

No more time was to be lost.

The window was speedily opened, and Claude passed out.

"Thank Heaven," he muttered, as he stood upon the soft mould in the garden, "all is well so far! I wonder whether the officers are close at hand? If I had but my horse now I would bid them all defiance."

Crouching down so as to be sure of escaping all observation, Claude made his way to the end of the garden.

Here a low hedge barred his further progress.

At this point he stopped and looked back.

His heart beat violently.

He could command a partial view of the moor, and as he gazed in this direction he caught sight of many moving forms.

"They are here," he murmured.

Evidently the officers were making their way as quickly as possible towards the cottage, in the hope apparently of taking their intended prisoner by surprise.

Claude was compelled to remain where he was, for he feared that if he attempted to climb over the hedge he would be seen.

In less than a moment the cottage hid his foes altogether from his view.

This was all he needed.

The hedge was crossed at once, and the highwayman felt as though his escape was half accomplished.

But the officers would in a very little while find that he had taken his departure.

They would be in no sort of doubt as to the direction in which he had gone; and as they were well mounted and strong, while he was on foot and feeble, it seemed tolerably certain that they would overtake him before he had gone many yards.

Claude now found himself in a small meadow, and at the first glance he gave around him he perceived some dark object only a few yards off.

At first he could scarcely believe in the extent of his good fortune.

But a second glance seemed to show him that he had fallen into no error.

The dark object was a horse.

If he could but capture it and mount, why even then all might be well.

He approached cautiously.

But another surprise, and one of a most agreeable character, was in store for him.

The horse he saw was his own.

The trappings had not been removed, and the creature looked fresh and full of vigour.

By what mysterious means he had got there at so opportune a juncture, Claude did not pause to inquire.

He spoke, and then the intelligent animal seemed to recognise his voice.

At any rate, it permitted him to walk straight up to it and seize the bridle, which is probably what it would not have allowed a stranger to do.

Just as our friend was about to mount, he heard a great tumult in the rear.

He knew well enough what it was, without troubling to look round.

He knew, too, that it would require a concentration of all his energies to accomplish what laid before him.

To mount his new-found steed was no easy matter, and but for the fact that the police officers were so close behind him, Claude would never have succeeded.

Once astride, however, and he cared for nothing.

Without waiting to settle himself in his seat, he urged his horse forward.

He was only just in time.

The officers, furious with disappointment, were close behind him.

The foremost one discharged a pistol, and with so good an aim that the highwayman felt the bullet strike his back.

But the force of the shot was spent, and so he received no other hurt than a slight shock, which, of course, he thought not of.

Once 'gain, then, was Claude going at headlong speed.

The officers, however, were determined to give him persistent chase.

They knew the feeble condition to which he was reduced, and felt certain that he would not be able to keep up long.

Claude himself felt very dubious as to the result.

Still his resolve was to hold on to the last.

The constantly increasing darkness was greatly in his favour.

Large clouds kept continually driving up, until the whole face of the heavens was covered up.

Then drops of rain began to fall.

At first slightly, but their force soon increased.

The cool water fell upon Claude's heated form most refreshingly.

It seemed to freshen him into new life.

He cried out in encouraging tones to his horse, and the animal bravely responded to them.

The rest it had enjoyed had made it fresh and vigorous.

No doubt it had been attracted to that meadow after Claude had fallen from the saddle, and so little frequented was this part of the country that it was no wonder it was allowed to remain for that space of time unmolested.

Away—away it flew, taking an almost direct course across the country, and utterly disregarding the various obstacles in its path.

More than one of the hedges over which it leaped were of a height and character to dismay an ordinary rider.

But the officers, having Claude's success before their eyes, essayed each dangerous leap.

Of course, riding pell-mell and in such a throng, some came to grief, but still a formidable band kept at the heels of the highwayman.

Still Claude kept on, sustained not only by the strong desire of effecting his own escape, but also by the hope that he might yet be able to be of service to his old comrade, Sixteen-String Jack.

The rain descended in torrents, and at no very distant intervals a flash of lightning would be seen, followed by a clap of thunder.

A violent storm evidently was brewing; but the conflict of elements had no terrors for the flying highwayman.

He was already drenched to the skin by the rain, and then he had the consolation of knowing that he could not by any possibility become wetter.

He listened continually—that is, as well as his rapid flight would allow—and he fancied he was fast distancing his pursuers.

This incited him to fresh efforts.

As to seeing, that was quite out of the question.

The darkness swallowed up every object at more than a few yards' distance.

But animated by the hope that success would ere long crown his efforts, Claude conquered the weakness that at times endeavoured to assert itself.

At length he came to a high-road.

He had been for a long time on the look-out for this, because he wished to change his course.

He stood for some time in doubt, however, for he knew not whether to turn to the right or left.

What he wished was to get on towards London, but as to the direction in which it lay he was unable to hazard even a guess.

"I fancy it must be to the right," he at last muttered to himself—"at any rate, I will try."

He now allowed his horse to go at a more gentle rate of speed in order that it might recover wind and strength.

The immediate fever of the pursuit was over now.

The police were, doubtless, well upon his track, and would in time come up with him if he relaxed his efforts altogether.

Claude felt terribly weak, and nothing but his stern determination enabled him to keep on.

Presently he saw before him a faint, twinkling light.

He hastened towards it.

As he had expected, this had proceeded from a road-side inn.

The sound of his horse's hoofs brought an ostler forward.

"Here you are, sir," he said, holding the stirrup for Claude Duval to dismount.

"No—no," said the highwayman, faintly, "I shall not alight. Bring me some—some brandy—a large glassful—and some oatmeal and water for my horse."

"All right, sir."

The ostler quickly returned with the articles for which he had been sent.

Claude drank nearly half a pint of neat brandy at a draught.

"My eye," the ostler ejaculated, "he's a well-seasoned vessel, and no mistake!"

The horse greedily partook of the refreshment offered it, and then Claude said:

"I am going right for London, I suppose?"

"Eh?"

"London—is this the way?"

Claude pointed in advance as he asked the question.

"Yes, that's the way," answered the ostler, scratching his head; "and a precious long way it is too."

"How far?"

"How far? Why, near enough two hundred miles. It's one hundred and ninety-nine and a half howsomever."

"So far?" said Claude, with a sigh.

"Yes. You ain't going to ride there, are you?"

"Never mind. Look here! Do you see this? It's a guinea."

"All right."

"And here's another. Now, if anybody comes and wants to know whether you have seen me, just know nothing about it; and in order that your forgetfulness may be complete, here is another."

"All right. I'll go and go to sleep, I will, and blow me if I don't think it will be a job to wake me—that I do."

He evidently comprehended.

Claude finished his brandy, and then set out upon what was to him a formidable undertaking—a ride to London; for it was here that he naturally enough expected to hear something of his comrades—at any rate, it was here where he should obtain intelligence of Sixteen-String Jack.

CHAPTER MLXXVII.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL MANIFESTS THE EXTENT OF HIS FRIENDSHIP FOR SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

It was on that very morning when Sixteen-String Jack began his ride from Newgate to Tyburn that a horseman was urging his horse along the western high-road.

In the distance he could discern the huge mass of buildings composing London.

There was something inexpressibly anxious in his gaze.

The horseman had about him many marks which showed that he had travelled far and at a rapid speed.

His long riding-cloak was spattered with mud even up to the shoulder, while as for his steed, it would have been a most difficult matter to decide what was its natural colour.

The poor animal was fearfully jaded.

At every step its limbs trembled convulsively, showing how great was the effort required for moving even at this pace.

The traveller himself looked also ready to drop with excessive fatigue.

His face looked more like the face of a corpse than of a living being, except that now and then it twitched nervously, as from some keen mental or bodily pain.

The reader will scarcely require to be told that this worn-out and travel-stained horseman was no other than Claude Duval.

With infinite difficulty he had performed thus much of his long journey, and now that its termination lay before

him he almost feared that he should be unable to reach it.

From time to time he had been compelled to pause for rest upon the road, but still the time allowed for his repose was short indeed, for the police officers still hung upon his track though unable to come up with him.

It is indeed a matter calculated to excite the greatest wonder that he should have been able to perform the journey at all.

Stimulants alone had enabled him to keep up.

The reaction would doubtless come at last, and, when it did, would be all the more terrible for having been so postponed.

But whenever Claude felt the sinking sensation coming over him he would swallow a huge draught of brandy, thus obtaining a fresh but factitious supply of strength.

Claude, however, was determined to get to London.

The idea had so fixed itself in his mind as to amount to a positive mania.

But then it is well known that it is impossible for the body to be affected without the mind becoming affected too, and certainly this must have been the case with Claude, for his ideas extended no further than simply arriving at the metropolis.

What he should do when there he would have been puzzled to tell.

What he could hope to accomplish now that he was reduced to the last stage of exhaustion was a mystery.

At the moment when his destination came in sight, some such questions as these crossed his mind, but his mental faculties were too much debilitated to allow him either to dwell upon or answer them.

He seemed impelled to go to London, but beyond that all was a blank which he vainly strove to pierce.

Another inn appeared in sight, and here he made another halt.

The landlord happened to be standing on his doorstep, and when he caught sight of the approaching traveller he could not help giving utterance to an ejaculation of amazement.

"Bless us and save us!" he cried—"what have we here?"

"Brandy!" said Claude, faintly, as without difficulty he brought his weary horse to a standstill—"Brandy!"

"Yes, sir!—hot or cold?"

"Half a pint neat, and send the ostler with something for the horse."

The landlord's amazement increased.

Nevertheless he passed indoors to execute the orders that had been given him.

His astonishment grew greater when he saw with what ease the large quantity of brandy was disposed of.

Some time had now elapsed since Claude had heard anything of his pursuers, and he might certainly have indulged himself in safety with a few hours' rest.

But his impatience now that he was so near to the end of his long journey was too great to permit this.

As soon as possible he took his departure from this inn, where the extraordinary appearance of himself and steed furnished a topic of conversation for many a day.

The stimulus of the ardent spirit now began to show itself.

His eye brightened, and much of his weakness passed away.

His horse too was perceptibly better.

The next halt was at Tyburn toll-gate.

Claude could not control the powerful impulse which prompted him to turn his eyes in the direction of the triple tree.

He started and looked again.

"Surely," he said, with a shudder, "this is Monday morning!"

He spoke as though up to that moment he had been unaware of the circumstance.

Beneath the blackened timbers of the gibbet could be seen the glittering helmets of many soldiers, while all around a remarkable concourse of people had assembled.

This was enough to make Claude aware that an execution of no ordinary character was about to take place that day.

Bat who was it?

Some prisoner of great importance, or the guard would not be so numerous and well armed.

Claude's heart sickened with dread.

"Now, sir," said a voice, "tuppence, please!"

The sound recalled Claude to himself.

He remembered that he was standing at the toll-gate.

Almost mechanically he plunged his hand into his pocket and dropped a piece of silver into the toll-man's hand.

"Tell me," Claude Duval asked, in a hollow voice — "who is it that is to be—executed to-day?"

Before replying, the toll-keeper honoured him with a long stare, while he juggled the change in his hands.

"You must have come from a longish way off," he answered, at length, "not to know that."

"Who is it?" the highwayman asked again, with an impatient gesture.

"Why, Sixteen-String Jack, to be sure, that has been for so long the terror of the road. Why—but I say—hallo!"

These disjointed exclamations were caused by Claude's actions.

The shock of this intelligence was at first so great that it was with the utmost difficulty he saved himself from falling from his horse.

Every object seemed to fade away from before him.

Then with a heavy groan he recovered his senses.

He called out in a loud tone to his horse, and spurred him cruelly.

The exhausted animal made a final effort and broke into a shuffling gallop.

The highwayman's brain was now on fire, while his swelling heart seemed as though it must burst.

Jack about to be executed!

He had, then, arrived too late.

What could he do now to save him?

What course could he adopt to rescue him from his foes?

Claude thought and thought until he wrought himself into a state of positive madness.

Frenzy alone had possession of him—frenzy alone can account for what he did.

Indeed, had he been in possession of his proper senses, he would not have thought of riding into London by broad daylight without making the least attempt at concealment.

To be sure, his cloak enveloped his form, and his face was so altered by illness and fatigue as to have but little semblance to its former appearance.

Still, to ride on as he rode can only be characterised as absolute insanity.

Suddenly, as he passed round a slight bend in the high-road, he came in sight of a dense throng.

His brain reeled.

Then his eyesight grew clearer, and he was able to make out the component parts of the multitude before him.

He saw soldiers mounted and glittering with weapons and accoutrements.

He saw multitudes of police officers, nearly all on horse-back, and every one armed with a drawn cutlass.

He saw in the distance the hangman's cart, the sheriffs' carriages, and, last of all, more soldiers and police officers.

And around all these, as water round an island, was a number of people greater than Claude had ever before seen.

The distance was too great for his eyes to make out who was the occupant of the fatal cart, but his heart told him.

He was inwardly conscious that it was his old and well-tried companion, Sixteen-String Jack.

At this moment Claude began to have doubts whether all that he saw was real, or whether he was the victim of some extraordinary illusion of the senses.

But this state of doubt was not permitted to continue very long.

There could be no doubt about the reality of the yells and cries that came from the throats of the assembled populace.

Then Claude asked himself what could be done?

Where now should he turn his eyes to look for help and assistance?

Tom King and Dick Turpin were he knew not where.

But for all that he could not think of permitting his old comrade to go passively to death without at least some effort, no matter how desperate, to save him.

There was no time for consideration.

The moment for action had arrived.

And now most certainly, had Claude not been more than half crazed, he would never for a single instant have contemplated making an attempt to save Jack single-handed.

But some such thoughts as these were running through Claude's mind.

He knew that popular sympathy would be on Jack's side, and he was sufficiently acquainted with the temper of crowds to be aware that this sympathy would be confined to mere cheers and cries unless some one should come forward and set them the example of action.

In that case he knew that their dislike of authority and its representatives would quickly instigate them to deeds of violence, and the liberation of the prisoner would afford them the utmost satisfaction.

Wild thoughts were these—desperate ones; but they were followed by others more wild and more desperate still.

Claude drew his cloak well around him, and pulled his hat low down over his brow.

Then he drew up to one side of the road, and awaited the coming of the procession.

It was now only a few yards off.

All eyes were at once turned towards Claude; but no one seemed to recognise him—a fact which will serve to show how much late events had altered his appearance.

"Halt!" he cried, in as loud and important a voice as his fatigue would allow. "Halt—halt, I say! Where is the sheriff?"

As might have been expected, no notice was taken of these words.

The procession continued on its way.

But as soon as Claude fairly found himself among the crowd, he cried:

"The sheriff—the sheriff! Where is the sheriff? I must see him! Where is he?"

The people, thinking probably that Claude carried a message of some importance, divided right and left, thus leaving him a clear passage, through which he could make his way as rapidly as he liked.

Claude did not fail to avail himself of this to the utmost.

There was no hesitation about him now.

He seemed to have made up his mind to a definite course of action.

And so he had.

What it was will be quickly seen.

There was no difficulty in picking out the sheriffs' carriages, for their excessive and gaudy ornamentation made them conspicuous objects.

Claude endeavoured to catch a glimpse of Jack as he sat in the cart.

But so densely was he hemmed in by mounted police officers that this was altogether impossible.

A very few minutes brought him to the door of the carriage in which the under-sheriff was riding.

His appearance attracted the attention of everyone.

But no one for a moment suspected that the haggard-looking individual was Claude Duval.

Such audacity as would be required for one with so heavy a price upon his head to mingle with a procession on its way from Newgate to Tyburn was undreamt of—incomprehensible.

The sheriff was a little red-faced man, whose eyes were almost buried in fat.

He looked as surprised as he was able when Claude placed his hand upon the sill of the coach window.

"Sir," he said, speaking in tones of deep sadness, to the effect of which the hollowness of his voice contributed not a little—"sir, I have a great—very great favour to ask of you, and in the sacred name of humanity I must ask you not to deny me."

"Eh?—what?" said the sheriff, with a puzzled air, for he was never able to grasp at the meaning of a sentence containing many words.

"I say I have a favour to entreat."

"But this isn't the time."

"Pardon me for being bold enough to differ from you; but—but—this is the time—the very moment."

"Eh? But what's it all about? What does it mean?"

"If you will allow me," said Claude, "I will explain."

"Well, well, go on—I am listening."

"It concerns the prisoner."

"The prisoner?" echoed the sheriff, with a slight change of colour.

"Yes, the condemned prisoner."

"The one in the cart?"

"Even so."

"Sixteen-String Jack?" said the sheriff, who, as Claude was silent, felt impelled to say something or other.

"Yes, so the unfortunate man has been known, but to me he is simple John Raun."

"To you—to you? How do you mean to you?"

"Why, in days long past, in the time of boyhood, he was my best and only friend."

"Your friend?" cried the sheriff, shrinking back.

"Yes; do not be alarmed. As you must be well aware, he followed evil ways. I knew what the result would be, but still he persisted in his fatal course. You understand me, sir?"

"Yes; but I don't know what it has to do with me."

"But you will see in a moment."

"Go on, then."

"I live more than two hundred miles from London, in a remote country place. By chance the intelligence that my old boyhood's friend had been captured reached me. I was ill—suffering greatly. But not long ago the parents of this misguided young man had died, and on their deathbed they had entreated me to use my best endeavours to reclaim the lost one. A dangerous illness alone prevented me."

The sheriff fidgeted about impatiently.

Claude spoke more rapidly.

"As soon as I heard what had happened, I started off. I have travelled almost incessantly ever since. I hoped to be in time to say farewell to him—I have just arrived, and find him on his way to Tyburn."

"Well, sir, and what do you want?" asked the sheriff, who never for a moment seemed to fancy that what Claude said was untrue.

Indeed, the highwayman's appearance was just calculated to corroborate what he had said.

He looked like one who had risen from a sick bed and made a long and fatiguing journey.

"Well, sir," repeated the sheriff, finding Claude did not speak, "I ask again, what do you want? What has all this to do with me?"

Claude's emotion increased.

"I want to ask you, sir, to grant me a great favour."

"And what is it?"

"That you will stay this procession for a moment, and that then you will allow me to say a few words of farewell to my old friend, and convey to him the last words of his parents. Had I arrived at Newgate in time, I know the request would not have been denied to me. It would be hard to deny me now, because I have been unable to make better speed. You will grant this favour, will you not?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Why not?" asked Claude, with an earnestness that was real indeed. It is not much I ask."

"But—but—"

"But what?"

"We—we are apprehensive of a rescue."

"Is it possible?"

"We have heard that some desperate attempt will be made to set the condemned man at liberty."

This intelligence caused such a revulsion of feeling on Claude's part that it was a great wonder the sheriff did not perceive his agitation.

Perhaps he did perceive it, but failed to ascribe it to its proper cause

CHAPTER MLXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK TAKES HIS LAST LOOK OF THIS WORLD.

THIS announcement made by the sheriff, to the effect that an attempt at rescue was apprehended, made Claude Duval doubly determined to bring the procession to a standstill.

Perhaps if he could only succeed in doing this he would be giving the opportunity for the attack to be made, for, of

course, Claude jumped. the conclusion that the sheriff had been correctly informed.

It is not surprising that he should do so.

Of the movements of Dick Turpin and Tom King he was quite ignorant, but considered nothing more probable than that they would endeavour to organise some plan of attack when they learned the serious position in which Sixteen-String Jack was placed.

These thoughts passed through his mind with that rapidity of which time alone is capable.

"Surely, sir," he continued, in reply to the sheriff's last remark—"surely, sir, you will not on that account refuse me this favour. Suppose for a moment you were in my place, should you not think it hard to be denied? Besides, consider what a consolation and satisfaction it would be to my unfortunate friend, not only to learn that his parents were not living, and so could not be sensible of his disgrace, but to hear the last words which those parents had said concerning him."

Claude's appeal evidently moved the sheriff.

"I will call Skellum," he said, "and hear what he says."

Who Skellum was Claude knew not, for he had never heard his name pronounced before.

Still, he drew his cloak up a little closer round his throat.

Skellum having been called, quickly made his way to the sheriff's carriage, for he expected to receive some important information.

The sheriff quickly explained to him the nature of Claude's request.

Skellum looked at the disguised highwayman keenly, but failed to recognise him.

Truth to tell, the idea that it might be one of the highwaymen of whom some of his men were in pursuit, never once crossed his mind.

"What is the answer, sir?" Claude asked, anxiously, for they were getting very near to Tyburn now.

"I leave it for Mr. Skellum to decide," said the sheriff.

"To me the request seems a very reasonable one, and if Mr. Skellum has no objection, I consent."

Claude was profuse in his thanks.

Then addressing Skellum, he said:

"Do not refuse me—pray do not! What can you have to fear from one worn down to the last degree of weakness as I am? What could I do in the shape of harm, even if I had the will?"

There could only be one answer to this question.

Skellum's first suspicion that there was something dangerous in all this was allayed.

He knew not how to refuse, and so gave his consent.

But he determined to keep very close behind Claude and to observe his every movement with the keenest attention. A feeling of unalloyed satisfaction now took possession of Claude Duval's heart.

Already in imagination he saw his old comrade a free man.

His presence by his side would be of the utmost service to those who intended to attempt a rescue.

But his breath came short and thick as he made his way through the throng under the guidance of Mr. Skellum, who made his way straight for the hangman's cart.

Claude wondered what effect his sudden appearance would have upon Sixteen-String Jack.

Would he recognise him?

Perhaps so.

This, however, was a risk which Claude was quite willing to run.

By command of Mr. Skellum the procession was brought to standstill.

It was the confusion consequent upon the execution of this order that had aroused Sixteen-String Jack to a knowledge of the fact that something of an unusual character was taking place.

The next moment he beheld Claude Duval.

He recognised his old comrade at the very first glance, but closed his eyes quickly, feeling certain that he was the victim of some inexplicable delusion.

He opened them again, only to see Claude standing still nearer, and to hear the familiar tones of his voice.

What could be the meaning of so strange a phenomenon?

Claude at liberty among so many of his foes, and, above all, with Skellum not an arm's-length from him.



[DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING MEET AGAIN AT OLD MATTHEW'S, IN DRURY LANE.]

Well indeed might Jack feel disposed to doubt the evidence of his own senses.

His heart bled when he saw to what a wreck Claude had been reduced, and fully comprehended how much he must have suffered since the time of their separation.

Claude came close to Jack's side.

"I am here either to save you or to die with you," he whispered. "Do not start—maintain your calmness at all hazards."

Claude glanced around him to ascertain whether Skellum was near, but he found that individual was no longer standing in the place where he had last left him.

Claude did not wait to ascertain his whereabouts, but resolved to avail himself to the utmost of the present opportunity.

"Be of good heart, Jack—the others have organised a rescue."

No. 234.—BLACK BERR.

Jack's heart was so full that he could scarcely command his voice to speak.

He had just been endeavouring to reconcile himself to the unpleasant fact that he was deserted by all his friends, when lo! here was Claude actually at his side.

Hope revived in his breast, for he thought that Claude had spoken from positive knowledge, and Jack had great faith in Dick Turpin's powers.

But alas! those hopes were doomed to a most bitter disappointment.

"How came you here, Claude?" Jack asked. "It puzzles me completely."

"Hush—hush! We must reserve explanations to another time. I wonder how it is they do not commence an attack."

Claude Duval was firmly impressed with the notion that his presence near the cart would serve as a signal for the commencement of the attack.

Each second he expected to hear the signal given, and then he determined to cut the cords with which Jack was bound, even if his life paid the penalty of the deed.

And now we must make the reader acquainted with something of which both Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were unfortunately in ignorance.

The very moment that Mr. Skellum stopped near the cart he felt some one touch him gently on the coat sleeve.

Turning round, he saw that it was a police officer.

There was unbounded wonder expressed upon the man's countenance.

He made a sign for Mr. Skellum to come nearer.

That individual complied instantly, for he knew by the officer's manner that something was amiss.

This was how it was that he happened to be out of sight when Claude turned round.

"Well," said Skellum, hastily, keeping his eyes all the time fixed upon the cart—"well?"

"Mr. Skellum."

"What?"

"D—don't you know who that is?"

"Who—who?"

"That man in the cloak—there—there!"

"Well—what of him?"

"Don't you know him?"

"No; how should I?"

The man looked agast.

"How comes he here?"

"Speak, dolt; who is it?" said Skellum, impatiently.

"I can't believe my eyes," said the man; "and yet it must be. No, no,—it can't: it is too outrageous."

"Who—who?"

"Why, that man in the cloak, standing there, is—"

And then again he paused, as though incredulous.

"Will you speak?"

"It is Claude Duval!"

"Who?" cried Skellum, with a perfect yell—"who?"

"Claude Duval. I am certain of it. Look at him now."

"Down with him!" roared Skellum—"shoot him! Fire—fire! That is Claude Duval, and the reward is just the same for him alive or dead!"

"Discovered!" cried Claude, in a voice of inexpressible anguish. "All, then, is lost! Help—help!"

"Shoot me, Claude!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Do me that last service! Save me from the disgrace of the hangman's rope!—shoot me! Let that be the last, as it is the first, proof I have asked you to make of your friendship."

Claude drew his pistols, but whether he meant to comply with his comrade's demand is not clear.

The officers had at first been too paralysed with amazement to obey Skellum's command, but they stood with their pistols levelled.

"Fire!" cried Skellum again. "Ten thousand curses! Why do you not fire? Shoot him, or he will rescue the prisoner and escape."

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than there was a sudden volley from more than a dozen pistols.

For a brief space of time a cloud of blue smoke concealed everything, and yet Skellum fancied he had seen Claude in the act of falling from his horse.

When the mimic cloud cleared away, which was in less than a moment, he found that he was right.

Claude Duval was lying helpless and motionless upon the ground—his body riddled with bullets—an ever-widening pool of blood surrounding him.

The confusion and uproar now were things of which we cannot hope to convey an idea.

"Guard your prisoner," cried Skellum, in stentorian tones—"look well to him, or he will be rescued! Stand firm!"

His orders were well responded to.

It was indeed a thousand wonders that Sixteen-String Jack had not been mortally wounded.

But the bullets whistled around him on every side and left him unhurt.

But the sudden slaughter of his old friend in cold blood almost maddened him.

He made a desperate attempt to break loose.

But he was too well bound for the attempt to succeed.

The next instant the officers were around him.

Skellum flung himself from his horse, and rushed to the spot where Claude lay.

"He is dead," he ejaculated, gazing upon him—"quite dead! How extraordinary! Who could have believed it?"

After what had occurred, Jack sat in the cart like one stunned by a heavy blow.

Life now, indeed, was bitter, and he felt that he cared not how soon he was rid of it.

Claude was dead, while he knew not what fate had befallen Dick Turpin and Tom King.

But from the fact that they had made no demonstration on his behalf he drew the worst conclusions.

The body of Claude was presently picked up, and a rude kind of bier extemporised, on which it was placed.

The order was given to convey it to Newgate, and a portion of the guard of officers and soldiers was ordered to accompany it, so as to protect it from the people.

Oh, how wistfully and earnestly Jack gazed after Claude as his remains were carried off!

When at last he could see his friend no longer, bitter tears forced themselves from his eyes and rolled down his cheeks, while heavy sobs seemed as though they would burst his chest.

As soon as away the second procession had been started on its way to Newgate, the interrupted journey to Tyburn was resumed.

A closer watch and guard than ever was kept upon Jack.

But it was needless, for he had quite given up all thoughts of making his escape now.

After what had happened death was preferable to life.

Tyburn no longer had terrors for him.

On the contrary, he was impatient for the termination of his journey to be reached.

They had not far to go.

Tyburn Tree was not many yards distant, but their rate of progress was very, very slow, for a path had to be forced through a mass of people who already seemed packed together as closely as was possible.

Jack's head was still bent down.

He did not turn his eyes to look, but he could feel just how far distant they were from the fatal tree.

Amid frequent stoppages the journey was continued.

At last there was a final pause.

The sun was shining in mid-sky, and there fell across the cart the dark shadow of the beams of Tyburn Tree.

Jack knew where he was then.

The end of his journey was reached.

Some one touched him.

He shrank back with a shudder of loathing

It was the hangman.

The Ordinary now stood up with his open book in his hand.

For some time past he had been reading the service for the dead; but though his voice was loud and clear, Jack had been unconscious of it.

As one may say, mechanically Jack followed the Chaplain's example and stood up in the cart.

A silence that was awful from its very intensity now prevailed.

Jack gazed around him with a semi-conscious, half-stupified air.

The events that had marked the latter portion of his journey had been of so awful and so sudden a character that no one can wonder that his brain was half turned by it.

He kept continually vaguely wondering whether this could indeed be real, and this wonder was accompanied by a kind of sensation that he should presently recover his senses and find all to be an hallucination.

But, alas! for him, this species of presentiment was not destined to be realised.

All was real, and although it might be said he was not aware of it, yet he was standing on the very threshold of eternity.

The duration of his life upon this earth could easily have been counted in seconds.

Again Jack felt a touch, and it seemed to arouse him a little.

It was the hangman.

This functionary had been during the last few moments

busily occupied in securing the rope to the cross-beam.

Apparently it was now adjusted to his entire satisfaction.

He had hung upon it so as to stretch it, and now nothing remained but to make a noose with it round the neck of the condemned man.

Before Jack could precisely comprehend what was going on, the rope was passed round his throat.

A choking sensation seemed now, at this last moment, to bring him back to life.

He looked around him, but the faces of the people seemed to float away, and in their place he saw, in imagination, the tragedy of Claude's death again represented.

Apparently that was his last earthly sensation.

The preparations had all been rendered complete.

The hangman and the Ordinary had quitted the cart, of which Jack was now the sole occupant.

It was, however, just as the hangman seized the bridle of the horse that some kind of disturbance seemed to be taking place on the outskirts of the crowd.

Whether Sixteen-String Jack was aware of it, or whether he derived any hope from the circumstance, who can tell?

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to remind the reader of the different manner in which executions were arranged in the times of which we write.

There was no platform then, with the falling trap that so speedily deprives the victim of his life.

The prisoner was left standing, while the cart was drawn from beneath him.

And it was thus that Sixteen-String Jack quitted this life.

Who can say what awful sensations seared his brain when he felt the only thing between him and death slipping slowly away from beneath his feet.

There seemed a kind of convulsive effort to retain a footing, and then all was over.

CHAPTER MLXXXIX.

DESCRIBES WHAT BEFELL TOM KING AFTER HIS FIGHT FROM STONEHENGE.

WE refrain from entering into any further details of the sickening scene.

We will only mention that the condemned man—to employ the phrase made use of at the time—"died hard."

And no wonder that there should be a desperate struggle between life and death when the victim was slowly choked—strangled by the weight of his own body.

But in a few moments the bold, daring highwayman, who had for so long a period set the whole machinery of the law at defiance, breathed his last.

Nothing remained of him save a senseless mass of inert clay that slightly swung to and fro, and half turned round in a hideous fashion as it was swayed by the light morning breeze.

No sooner, however, was it known that life was extinct than the intense silence of the assembled crowd changed to a tremendous uproar.

Some said that a well-organised attempt to rescue the prisoner had been made, and the chief cause of its failure was that the attempt had been made too late.

There were others, though, who said that this was a mere idle rumour.

At any rate, the scene of fearful riot which now ensued was a disgrace to a nation setting up any claim to civilisation.

Savages could have behaved no worse.

And this lasted for an hour—the time prescribed for elapsion before the hanged man was cut down.

A great part of the crowd no doubt dispersed before this, but the bulk remained.

After the ceremony they had by degrees separated.

The body was roughly placed in the rudely-made coffin provided for its reception, and, still guarded by soldiers, made its way back to Newgate.

Here the two highwaymen who had been so long united during life were again placed side by side in death.

The fatality was a strange one.

It was about this period that the custom of interring executed prisoners within the walls of the prison was commenced.

Previously they were either handed over to the doctors for dissection, or else suspended in irons upon a gibbet in proximity to the scene of crime.

But Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were to be buried in the prison.

A larger grave than ordinary was dug, and in this the two coffins were placed, so that the two friends were still side by side.

The earth was shovelled in, and the sole funeral service was comprised in the remarks made by the turnkeys as they as hurriedly as possible got through their disagreeable task.

That the intelligence of the extraordinary manner in which the famous highwayman Claude Duval had met with his death should fly like lightning over the whole city is no matter for surprise.

But the effects of this news upon those particularly interested in the highwayman's welfare we must defer to another occasion.

So much is waiting for relation in order that the narrative may be brought down to one point, that we must defer for the present a description of the startling events which followed fast upon the interment of the two highwaymen.

We go back several days—in fact, to the morning which succeeded the night when the highwaymen were attacked at Stonehenge.

It was only just getting light, and objects for the most part were buried in a dense white vapour.

As this by degrees rolled away, the different features of the landscape came into view.

One of the most prominent was a precipitous cliff, which served for a wall to prevent the encroachment of the ever-surging sea.

The landward side of this cliff was rugged and steep, and in most places overgrown with tangled vegetation.

The spot was excessively lonely and drear, and looked so, especially when shrouded by the white vapour we have mentioned.

No traces of even the occasional presence of human beings on that dreary spot could be discerned, and the silence was only broken by the unending roar of the breaking waves on the beach below.

All at once, the desolation of the place was strangely broken in upon.

An eye fixed upon a certain portion of the cliff side would have beheld a singular phenomenon.

What seemed to be nothing else than a portion of the solid rock slowly rose up, disclosing a dark oblong opening in the ground.

Immediately afterwards, a dusky form appeared at the aperture.

"I told you so, captain," said a gruff voice. "Morning has fairly come at last, and devil a sign is there to be seen of the old Ferret or his waggon either."

"Are you sure?"

"Come and look for yourself, captain."

Another dusky form now appeared at the mysterious opening.

"What a fog!" said the new-comer. "If the Ferret would come even now I would risk it; anything would be better than keeping the cargo here."

"Oh, it's safe enough, captain—take my word for that no one will find this place out."

"No matter, the goods ought to be inland by this time."

"Hush!" said the first speaker. "I heard something then."

"What was it like?"

"A horse."

"Then perhaps it is the Ferret after all. Curse him for being so long, say I! What the devil can have detained him?"

Both listened.

"It's not the Ferret, captain."

"If it is, he is without a waggon."

"No—no, he would not ride like that. Why, a man must be mad to gallop a horse at such a rate!"

The rapid beats of a horse's hoofs could now be heard, and, from the rapidity with which these succeeded one

another, it was evident that the animal was making no ordinary speed.

The two dark forms at the opening in the ground stood with eyes fixed wide open by curiosity.

"I should think it is some horse broke loose," said the captain, at length. "No one would be mad enough to ride towards the precipice at such a rate as that."

"We shall see in a moment," returned the other. "Curse the fog, how thick it is!"

"Yes—yes, there it comes—a horse with something on its back; but not a man, surely!"

The utmost excitement now prevailed.

Through the dense mist could be seen the figure of a horse, which seemed to be enveloped in a cloud of half-transparent vapour.

Upon the animal's back was a something, but what could not be distinctly seen.

It did not look like a man, for it was something that appeared to be crouching close to the saddle, and partly hanging down on one side.

But two causes combined to dispel the mystery.

The mist was fast rising, and the horse was galloping towards the opening in the ground with scarcely, if at all, diminished speed.

"It's a man," said the captain, at length—"yes, it's a man; and either dead or badly wounded."

There could no longer be a doubt about the correctness of this conjecture.

But, stranger still, the horse, fluting himself near the aperture, stopped suddenly—so suddenly that its rider, unable any longer to keep the saddle, fell heavily to the ground.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of the captain and his subordinate upon viewing this occurrence.

"Who can it be?" gasped the former.

"The horse has been here before," was the reply. "He knows the place well enough, that is evident, or why should he stop?"

"Let us see who it is," was the captain's next remark. "Curse it! if they are here many moments it will be quite light, and then there will be no knowing what may see us."

"The place may be discovered."

"We must prevent that, at all hazards. Ah!" said the captain, bending down over the blood-stained and apparently lifeless form. "I know him. It's all right. Call some of the Sea-gulls to carry him inside, and lead the horse in as well."

"Who is it, captain?" asked the other, who had just whistled shrilly.

"Why, one of those chaps that rendered us such good service the other night."

"What, the one we have provided the Sea-gull for?"

"Yes."

At this moment the aperture was thronged with men, all clad in a species of naval costume.

The captain of the band of smugglers—for he indeed it was—had not been mistaken.

It was Tom King who had been brought thus to the secret entrance of the cave.

The reader will easily be able to account for his presence in this place.

After speaking to Claude Duval in the manner we have related at the close of a preceding chapter, he had started off at full speed.

But Tom King was badly hurt—

So badly that his last words were almost inaudible.

But, nevertheless, although all objects seemed whirling around him, he retained his place in the saddle.

He was, however, quite beyond the power of making any effort to urge his horse forward.

The animal went entirely at the rate which pleased him.

By an accident, this chance to be extremely rapid.

The horse had been wounded by one of the pistol shots—just sufficient to madden the creature by the irritation it occasioned.

Under this incitement, as though urged by the spur, the poor animal flew across Salisbury Plain with a speed which equally defies description or conception.

We can only characterise it as furious to a degree.

An ordinary rider would have been appalled at finding

himself upon the back of such an infuriated animal; but Tom King thought nothing of it.

His life depended upon his getting away quickly, and he would have preferred a thousand times to meet with his death by some unforeseen accident than fall into the hands of his foes for a moment.

Tom reasonably enough dreaded capture, for he was fully convinced after what had happened he would never be allowed the ghost of a chance of making his escape.

Still, as he was able to exercise so little control over his steed, there seemed every probability that his capture would ere long take place.

The animal's terror would most likely abate before long, and then, being left to himself, his rate of speed would be decreased.

Of this danger it cannot be said that Tom King was precisely conscious.

He knew he was flying from his foes, but of the direction in which he was going at so frightful a pace he had no idea.

But truly to him, under these circumstances, all ways were alike so that his foes were in his rear.

But the animal showed no signs of flagging—to have beheld it one would have thought it must be under the continual influence of whip and spur, and that they were both plied with the utmost vigour.

As we have seen, however, the horse, in spite of its terror, was not altogether blind to instinct.

The reader will remember that its last journey was from the smugglers' cave to the ruins at Stonehenge.

In the former place it had remained for some considerable time, and all the while it had been well treated, so there is nothing wonderful in the circumstance that it should make its way back to its old quarters by the nearest and most direct route.

How opportune was the moment of its arrival there is known.

Consciousness had left Tom for some time, and he only owed his seat in the saddle to the vigour with which he had grasped the pommel of the saddle.

He had seized it with the convulsive grasp of a dying man, and so, half lying on the horse's back and half lying on one side in the most perilous position imaginable, he had reached his destination.

The sudden jerk, however, dismounted him, and bereft him of what little consciousness he might have retained up to this moment.

At a word from the captain, several of the men came forward, and, raising Tom in their arms, carried him into the cavern.

The horse was now quiet and subdued enough, and permitted himself to be led in unresistingly.

"Down with the trap!" cried the captain, in a rapid voice. "Look! I can see horsemen yonder! Quick—quick, or we shall be discovered!"

There was a sudden rushing noise, and the huge trap-door resumed its former position.

"That's well," was the captain's ejaculation; and then, having issued a few commands respecting Tom King, he mounted to another place where, through a kind of loophole, he could obtain a partial view of the scene without.

Of course the approach of these horsemen filled him with some little anxiety, and he wished to keep a close watch upon all their actions.

The reader will not require to be told that these horsemen were Tom's pursuers.

They were only able to get thus far so soon by treating their horses cruelly and by obtaining relays.

On they came, and by their manner they evidently expected each moment to catch sight of the fugitive.

By this time very little of the mist remained.

The sun had risen, and his beams illuminated the scene for miles round.

The officers looked keenly about them.

But, in spite of their efforts, they failed to catch a glimpse of the object of their anxious pursuit.

But they came on towards the cliff as though aware that the fugitive had taken this direction.

The captain began to grow anxious.

He was apprehensive that there might be on the ground some marks by which the officers could follow in the right track.

it so, the secret of the cave would undoubtedly have been discovered; and the captain was more than usually anxious in consequence of the quantity of goods now stowed away in it.

But his apprehensions subsided.

The police officers rode by, making their way apparently to the top of the cliff.

No doubt they thought that from this point they should be able to command an extensive view.

More easy in his mind now, the captain quitted his post, and made his way to that portion of the cavern to which he had directed the wounded highwayman to be taken.

He found Tom quite insensible, and bending over him was a woman who possessed no ordinary skill in surgery, especially in the matter of shot-wounds or sword-cuts.

From the nature of the smugglers' occupation, her skill was very often called into requisition.

"Well, Meg," asked the captain, "what do you think?"

"Bad—very bad."

"But you will bring him round?"

"I will try."

"Take my advice, and try your best, for, unless I am now more mistaken than I have ever been in the whole course of my life before, this is a man who will reward you in no ordinary fashion for restoring him to life."

"It will take a long time," muttered the old woman, "no matter how he may be favoured."

To this remark the captain did not think fit to make any reply, but walked away with the air of one by no means easy in his mind.

For a long time the old woman tried in vain to restore Tom to his senses; and when she did succeed it was but for a moment, for the highwayman immediately closed his eyes and sank off into a profound slumber.

But this augured well, and in the meantime she took the opportunity of attending to his hurts.

They were indeed of a frightful character, and any one of them would have sufficed to create grave doubts about the ultimate recovery of the patient.

Fortunate—thrice fortunate was Tom in having thus fell into such good hands.

Had his wounds been left for any longer time unattended to, his death must have been the result.

Now, however, thanks to the sagacity of his horse, he was in what might be termed a place of perfect safety, for there was no fear that the smugglers would betray him; and as for the officers discovering the entrance to the cave, that was scarcely likely.

CHAPTER MLXXX.

IN WHICH TOM KING SETS OUT ON HIS EXPEDITION IN SEARCH OF HIS MISSING COMRADES.

A VIOLENT fever seized upon Tom King, attended by delirium.

The smugglers in the cave listened in wonder to his wild ravings, from which, however, they obtained a clue to his identity.

Days elapsed before the wounded man obtained the least inkling of his condition or of his whereabouts.

But when he opened his eyes and languidly looked about him he was aware that the objects he beheld were familiar ones.

Where it was he had seen them, or how he came now to be surrounded by them, were questions which, in his present state, he was powerless to solve.

But from the moment when he thus, for the first time, regained possession of his mental faculties, he grew steadily better.

Never had old Meg obtained a greater victory, for so desperate had been the highwayman's condition that half the doctors in London would have given him up as a hopeless case.

With many a bitter pang, however, did the remembrance of past events return clearly, though slowly, to him.

His last remembrance was riding at a headlong pace through the darkness.

How he had come to be an inmate of the smugglers' cave he knew not.

He was chafing from the ignorance he was in upon this

point, when the captain, who had heard he was better, came to the side of the rude bed.

Tom questioned him anxiously, and then he learned all those particulars with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

From this knowledge the wounded highwayman derived but little consolation or satisfaction.

Fain would he at that moment have set off in quest of his lost comrades, but he found himself unable to raise his head six inches from the bed.

"Rest and be quiet," said the captain. "It is the only chance you have; and the calmer you keep yourself the sooner you will recover and be enabled to take your departure."

Tom knew this well enough without being told.

The difficulty was, under such circumstances as those in which he was placed, to put such counsel into action.

Although, mentally, he was greatly agitated, yet he contrived to keep himself tolerably calm.

More weary time passed.

How long Tom knew not, for in that dark place, where there was nothing to distinguish day from night, it was no easy matter to keep count.

Still he was encouraged by the knowledge that he was steadily continuing to gain strength.

Finally a time arrived when he felt it would no longer be possible to remain in inaction.

He was able to move about the cavern, and as soon as this was the case it became impossible for him to remain any longer in confinement.

Fortunately he had about him such an amount as satisfied the smuggler captain, who said, with great impressiveness:

"Tom King, you and your companions can, with the utmost safety, trust yourselves in my hands. No earthly consideration shall induce me to betray you."

"You shall be well rewarded for your fidelity," answered Tom.

"That I know well; and now will you consent to take a little advice from me?"

"Assuredly."

"Well, then, as soon as you can meet with your companions send them here—one at a time, if you like: you see the retreat is a perfectly safe one."

"True."

"Then as soon as you are all assembled and in readiness to start, I will have a craft at hand that shall wait you over to the coast of France in less than twelve hours."

Tom warmly expressed his thanks, and declared that he should not fail to put such a good piece of advice into execution.

At any other time he would have had much more to say upon the subject, but now he was too anxious to rejoin his companions to be able to think of aught else.

He was pleased to find that his horse was in the best condition, for during his illness it had been well attended to.

The animal seemed capable of making a very long journey indeed.

Plenty of ammunition was placed at Tom's disposal, so that he may be said to have been as well equipped for his expedition as could be desired.

Before leaving, however, a scout was sent out to ascertain whether the coast was clear, and on his return with the intelligence that there was not a soul in sight, the huge trap-door was raised by means of the machinery attached, and Tom issued forth.

He mounted without delay, and rode off, while the trap-door was immediately closed, lest its whereabouts should become known to some prying eye.

The night was dark but fine—just such a one as would be chosen for an excursion on the high-road: but on the present occasion Tom had other thoughts.

He had been for so long an inmate of the cavern that he felt the cool night wind acutely.

He shivered, for it seemed to cut through his very bones.

Every now and then he would be reminded most unpleasantly that he was in a state of very great weakness, and but little fitted for the task he had undertaken.

But his strong determination enabled him to master his weakness in a very great degree.

Ere he had gone far, however, he began to ask him-

self a question which he ought to have taken into consideration earlier.

This was, where should he be likely to meet with his comrades?

When they separated there was no time to arrange a meeting-place, and so there was nothing but uncertainty before him.

Strive as he would, he could not make up his mind as to which would be the point they would most likely fix upon to repair to.

At last, as one may say almost in sheer desperation, he resolved to turn his horse's head in the direction of Stonehenge.

It was there he had seen them last, and perhaps on arrival there something would arise to put him on the right track.

This was a frail hope indeed, still it was his only one, and so he clung to it as people do cling to a thing when they know it is their last and only resource.

The distance to Stonehenge was considerable, yet such was the excellent condition of his steed that the journey was performed in comparatively speaking a short space of time.

On reaching Stonehenge Tom found the place silent and deserted, and showing no signs of the conflict which had taken place there such a short time ago.

To Tom it appeared particularly short, owing to the length of time he had passed while in a state of complete unconsciousness.

Vainly, however, did he search around for some trace of his absent friends.

He even had the temerity to raise his voice and call aloud upon them by name, but the only reply he received was the mocking echo of his own voice.

Tom's heart was heavily oppressed.

He was weighed down by a presentiment that something terrible to all of them was about to happen.

The mysterious gloom which enwrapped the Druids' Stones was well calculated to inspire melancholy reflections.

Suddenly, however, the silence was broken in upon by a sound that struck a chill to Tom's heart.

It was a mocking laugh.

"Ha, ha!" said some one.

Tom raised himself and looked around, while his hand instinctively sought for his weapons.

"Ha, ha!"

Nothing could be more horribly discordant and un-mirthful than this laugh.

Tom felt that it was in derision of himself and his efforts.

"Ha, ha!"

The unnatural sound seemed to come from different quarters of the ruins.

Tom shuddered, for, in spite of himself, superstitious fancies began to crowd about his heart.

He was just then in the state of mind for an occurrence of this description to make a deep impression upon him.

"Who and what is it?" he cried, though it cost him a great effort to raise his voice. "Who and what is it, I say?"

No answer was returned.

Tom waited, but the silence seemed to grow more and more profound.

"I will trouble myself no further with this," he said, half aloud and half to himself. "I am weak and fanciful, and this desolate spot affects me. It may have been my fancy only. I will go—I will go."

He urged his horse forward a few paces and then stopped.

"In what direction shall I go?" he asked himself, with a heavy sigh. "Alas! I know not, but feel as though I stood on the brink of an ocean of misfortune. Let me try to think again. London—yes, Jack was taken to London: that is, if he did not escape by the way. He has gone to London. I promised to rescue him. The others have doubtless gone thither—I will go there too, and will do my best to help him. Yes—yes, I ought to have thought of it before. London—London."

"Ha, ha!"

Again that derisive, mysterious laugh.

He had uttered the last word a little louder than the rest, and the laugh seemed to mock at his intention.

"This is unbearable!" he exclaimed. "It is no freak of fancy! Dastardly coward! Whoever you may be, come forth and face me—I fear you not!"

Again silence.

This was most provoking.

Tom was tempted to stay and endeavour to unravel the mystery; but upon a second thought he remembered how precious was every moment of time, and that in justice to his comrades he ought to allow no delay.

"Some other time," he muttered—"some other time—not now. London—London—I must go to London."

"Stay!" said a voice, so abruptly and so close at hand, that Tom started, while his horse swerved violently.

Tom glanced around, but in the dark shadow cast by the Druids' Stones he could distinguish nothing.

But there was something definite about the command, and Tom almost mechanically obeyed it, while he waited impatiently to hear something more.

But again vexatious silence followed.

"Why should I stay?" the highwayman asked, angrily.

"You ride to your death!" said the same voice.

But this time the speaker seemed behind him.

Tom instantly wheeled round.

But, as before, he could see nothing.

"I ride to London," he said, at length.

"You ride to your death!" repeated the voice, but in such wild, screaming tones, that it was impossible to say whence the sound proceeded.

"I will hear no more!" Tom cried. "It is doubtless some person playing a game at the expense of my credulity and superstition. But if ever I discover them, woe be to them!"

Tom at once set forward with the settled determination of riding out of the ruins as quickly as he could.

But the hideous voice pursued him with yells and screams, and occasional outbursts of unnatural laughter.

"You ride to your death!"

The shrieking tones rang in Tom's ears as he urged his steed towards London.

Cold drops of sweat stood upon his brow.

Had this adventure left him unmoved, Tom would indeed have been something more than mortal.

Strive as he would, he could not bring himself to believe that all this proceeded from a trick—though he would fain have persuaded himself so.

It seemed as though he had been warned that if he rode to London he should ride to his death.

But even had he been sure that the warning was a real one, it would not have induced him to abandon his companions to their fate.

"It may be to my death," he said, with another weary sigh, which seemed to be wrung from him more by excessive bodily exhaustion than aught else—"it may be to my death; but, for all that, I shall ride to London; and as for the incomprehensible event which has just occurred, I will banish it from my mind, as it deserves to be."

It is easy enough to make resolves of this kind, but very difficult indeed to carry them out.

Tom found this to be the case, for as he urged his horse at a hard gallop in the direction of the metropolis, he fancied in every hoofbeat that he could hear the echo of that horrible voice.

The wind whistled it in his ears—

The rustling of the tree-tops resembled it.

It could not be banished.

But still Tom kept bravely to his course.

He wanted to make the most of the hours that remained between then and daybreak.

He had only his own senses to guide him on his course, but, like the manners of old, he glanced up at the shining stars in the sky, and shaped his course accordingly.

Thus he continued until the morning sun was some distance above the horizon.

The part of the country he was in proved so very lonely and unfrequented, that he resolved to push on, though his original intention had been to travel only during the night time.

It was somewhere towards ten o'clock when he caught sight of the first habitation he had seen for a long, long time.

Fancying it might be an inn, he slightly changed his course, and turned his weary horse's head towards it.

His conjecture proved correct.

The place had a silent, sequestered air, as though it was only rarely that travellers paused before the door.

No one was in sight, and Tom was about to call aloud for the ostler, when his attention was attracted to a bill that was pasted on a pump that stood at one end of the long horse trough.

Prompted by curiosity, and perhaps also by a conviction that the bill in some way concerned himself, he drew nearer.

The first glance was enough to satisfy him that he was not deceived.

He did not stop to read it.

He was satisfied when he saw that it offered a large reward to anyone who would capture Dick Turpin.

Clearly, then, this little public-house was no resting-place for Tom.

While a description of himself was pasted upon so conspicuous a situation he could scarcely hope to remain unrecognised.

Accordingly, upon the very instant that he made this discovery the highwayman set spurs to his tired horse, and continued on his way just as the landlord and ostler made their appearance.

They called aloud for Tom to stop, but, of course, he disregarded their cries entirely.

"Very likely I shall find this to be the case at every inn upon the road," he murmured, "and, for fear that it should be so, will not attempt to stop at any of them. What I require I must obtain elsewhere."

This was no pleasant prospect for Tom, who thought, and not without reason, that he might travel a long time without meeting with a habitation of any kind.

But fortune seemed inclined to favour him, for, before noon, he observed a farm-house pleasantly situated upon a hillside, and only a little way out of the course he intended to take.

Here he repaired, and the inmates of the place, who were easy-natured, good-tempered people, treated him most hospitably.

It was certain that they had not the remotest idea of his identity, though one would have thought there was much in the appearance of the highwayman to excite suspicion.

Despite his terrible fatigue, Tom stayed here only till nightfall.

His anxiety to learn something of his friends made rest almost an impossibility.

His horse, however, was all the better for this brief halt; and having liberally rewarded the people at the farm, Tom King continued on his way.

"London," he murmured to himself—"when shall I be there? Late—too late, I fear! Riding to my death! Am I doing so? Bah! I will think of it no more."

To follow the highwayman's course more minutely than we have already done would only be tedious.

It was not as though his journey was likely to be marked by any incidents of a deeply-interesting or very extraordinary description.

His main care was to keep out of sight of his fellow-men as much as possible, and arrive at his destination in the least possible space of time and by the most unfrequented route he could discover.

The reader, then, will not be surprised to learn that, without the occurrence of anything of a sufficiently startling description to merit record, he reached London.

By a strange fatality, however, the time of his arrival was something less than twelve hours after Claude Duval's.

As Tom King rode at a round pace along the broad high-road little did he think by what a short time Claude had preceded him; and still further from his thoughts was the supposition that at that very moment, when he was looking forward hopefully to a reunion, two of his old comrades were lying interred beneath the flagstones in one of the passages of Newgate.

A terrible blow awaited him—one that would be all the more terrible on account of its entire unexpectedness.

Unlike Claude, in the morning, Tom King had arranged in his own mind a clear and definite course of action.

He had no need to pause for deliberation.

His intention was to make his way as secretly as he could to Old Matthew's, in Drury Lane.

There was much danger to be encountered, doubtless,

in the attempt, but he felt that if anywhere, the White Horse was the place where some intelligence of his friends could be obtained.

Taking every precaution, then, to avoid recognition, he rode through the gate at Tyburn.

A glare of light attracted his attention to a spot lying on his left hand.

It was where the hideous gallows stood, near which, for some cause or other, a huge fire was burning.

Dusky figures moved about, exciting the highwayman's curiosity very strongly, but he could not spare the time just then to ascertain the meaning of what he saw.

He fancied that an execution was about to take place on the morrow—not that there had been one early that morning.

London now was only a very short distance in advance.

An hour at most, he hoped, would see him on Old Matthew's threshold.

Turning at once into the dark and narrow streets, he made his way, in a devious direction, to the spot he so much wished to reach.

Contrary to his expectation, but little notice was bestowed upon him, and from this he derived the hope that he should be able to gain the White Horse undetected.

There was a reason, however, for Tom's remaining thus unmolested.

The officers were all busy congratulating themselves upon the success they had already achieved, and were planning fresh designs to be put into immediate execution.

Thus it happened that the highwayman succeeded in reaching Old Matthew's in perfect safety.

Tom shrunk a little from entering, however, for the house seemed ~~un~~ any full of company.

CHAPTER MLXXXI.

BRINGS DICK TURPIN ONCE AGAIN BEFORE THE READER.

TERRIBLE indeed was the shock to Dick Turpin when, on recovering from his illness, he discovered that what had haunted him, and seemed like a terrible dream, was a hideous reality.

Such grief as preyed upon Turpin's heart cannot be expressed by words—only those who have suffered a similar bereavement can form a due conception of it.

Maud was dead!

It seemed, then, as though the only tie that bound the bold highwayman to earth was rudely severed, and for ever.

Buried, too—laid beneath the earth by strangers' hands, and, above all things, him absent from the ceremony.

That, indeed, was an additional pang of extreme intensity.

It would not be too much to say that this circumstance redoubled Dick's grief, were it not for the impossibility of such a thing.

During the state of utter prostration which followed his recovery from the violent fever into which he had been thrown, he occupied himself in minutely questioning the good woman of the house.

From her lips he learned the whole of the particulars connected with poor Maud's decease and burial.

Then, when strength returned to the highwayman's exhausted frame, the first use he made of it was to creep towards the little graveyard.

The distance was trifling, but almost too great for Dick in his present state.

He accomplished it; and when he entered the silent little enclosure he needed no one to point out the grave.

Interments in this retired hamlet were comparatively rare events.

There was but one grave that was not furnished either with a rude cross or headstone, or else was covered with beautiful flowers.

That one grave looked conspicuous enough among those around it, for the dark colour of the recently-dug earth formed a great contrast to the bright green flower-spangled turf that met the eye on every side.

With a terrible groan—such a sound as one would imagine a human being would give vent to at the

moment when a heart is broke with grief—Dick Turpin threw himself at full length upon the grave.

Tears, hot and scalding, streamed from his eyes—sobs that shook his whole frame seemed to burst from his throat rather than be uttered.

There was no human being near to look upon his great affliction, and Dick gave way to it without restraint.

Bitterly—most bitterly did he reproach himself for having been the means of bringing down upon one so good and gentle such an untimely, undeserved fate.

But for the fatal chance that had brought them together, how happy and how stainless might have been her lot!

Vain indeed were these regrets, and it was the knowledge that they were so which made his reproaches all the more poignant.

Oh, how he wished that he had never lived to be made acquainted with so much misery!

How he wished that he was lying calmly and peacefully at her side!

From this moment forth he felt life would have no charms for him.

The bold, light-hearted terror of the road was in existence no longer—Turpin's life would never be again what it had been.

He felt that he should court death rather than shun it, and that he should rejoice when a bullet laid him low.

More than once, in his distracting anguish, he was about to lay violent hands upon his own life.

It was only a sense of duty—a knowledge that he had something to perform—that enabled him to restrain himself.

He thought of his companions—those who looked up to and trusted him as leader.

He was certain that they never stood more in need of his services than they did now.

At length Dick rose from the grave; and if anyone had observed his face at the moment when he entered the little churchyard and had seen it now, the difference would indeed have appeared striking.

His features were now composed.

To all outward appearances he was calm; but he looked like one who had decided upon the performance of some great and necessary duty.

Determination—invincible determination showed out in every lineament.

His step was slow as he made his way back to the little cottage, but he fancied it was somewhat firmer than when he set out.

Suddenly, however, as he walked on his way, a bright flush of colour came into his cheeks—a light sparkle in his eyes.

All at once his gaze had fallen upon his gallant mare, Black Bess.

Some idea of his grief may be formed when it is known that up to this moment he had been so absorbed that the very existence of his faithful steed had been forgotten.

As he gazed upon her noble form his heart smote him, for no one knew better than himself how much he owed to her.

Black Bess, as usual, had recognised her master.

With a low neigh, expressive of the utmost gratification and delight, she bounded towards him and rubbed her head against his breast, as was her wont.

Tears stood in the highwayman's eyes.

"Poor Bess," he murmured, though his emotion almost choked him—"poor Bess! I ought to think myself fortunate in having you left me. God knows, when you are gone, I shall be a wretched and forlorn outcast indeed!"

The prospect seemed too terrible for contemplation, and holding down his head, he caressed the noble creature's neck.

But the joy which Black Bess exhibited upon then finding her master after so long a separation jarred most unpleasantly upon Dick's spirits.

He could not bear to see it, and so continued his way to the cottage.

He had some trouble to prevent her from entering after him.

The next day saw the highwayman once more calm, settled, and determined.

He was leaving the cottage with the intention of again visiting Maud's last resting-place, and wondering how he should proceed to render assistance to his comrades, when he caught sight of a form that seemed familiar to him.

It was that of a man.

Evidently he recognised Dick, for he waved his hand and walked rapidly up from the beach.

Turpin, however, could not remember where he had seen the man before.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the new-comer, touching his hat in nautical fashion, "I hope I do not intrude upon you, but I thought—that is, I fancied that you might want my boat again, and if you do, there it is high and dry on the beach."

Dick now remembered the man perfectly.

It was the fisherman who had done such good service by bringing Maud and himself over from England in his bark.

There was a certain air of embarrassment about the fisherman, a kind of expectation of something, the cause of which Dick did not for a moment comprehend.

But his memory was beginning to come back to him and to serve him more faithfully.

"I have not yet fulfilled my promise about the reward," said Dick, in reply; "but fear not that I shall fail to do so."

"Oh, sir, that's all right enough; I would not have mentioned such a thing for the world. I was very sorry to hear of your loss," he added, with a tear in his eye, "because I can understand it."

"Is not your wife better?"

"No better, sir, I am afraid, and yet I can't say that she is worse."

"Let us hope for the best."

The man shook his head.

"At any rate," continued Dick, "you shall have the means of providing her with every luxury; and if delicacies will save her life, be under no apprehension about it."

"I hope it may be so, but yet I can't help thinking that you rate my service too high."

"That would be impossible. But never mind that now. Your presence here just at this particular moment is most opportune, and you will be able greatly to increase the obligation I am under to you."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, I desire instant passage back to England—that is," he added, in a broken voice, "in the course of an hour or two."

The prospect of leaving Maud affected him terribly.

"I shall be ready, sir," answered the fisherman. "I will go and trim my boat at once. The tide will serve in about a couple of hours, and we ought not to lose the advantage of it."

"No, no, certainly not. I will take care to be quite ready by then. On my arrival I will place the reward in your hands."

The fisherman expressed his thanks as well as he was able, then turned away.

Dick Turpin, with slow and melancholy footsteps, took his way for the last time to the little graveyard, beneath the turf of which reposed all that was dear to him in this life.

Seating himself upon the little mound of earth which marked Maud's grave, he buried his face in his hands and gave himself up to thought.

Who shall attempt to describe the nature of his reflections on this occasion?

We shrink from the task.

The solemn sound caused by the church clock striking the hour roused him once more to the concerns of this life.

When he lifted his head his face was very pale, and his eyes deep sunk and lustreless.

Ineffably sad and yearning was the glance which Dick gave to the grave; then, as though he could not trust himself to remain a moment longer, he turned away.

Near the little picturesque gate, however, he was obliged to pause.

He looked around him carefully and slowly, as though desirous of impressing every one of its details upon his mind.

There seemed to be an inward consciousness that he



[KING IS SHOT BY BUCK TWAPIN.]

should never again be able to look upon that peaceful scene except in imagination.

Yet his determination was that if he could only succeed in performing the duty which he felt was owing to his comrades by himself, he would make his way back to this place, and pass the remainder of his life in it in humble retirement.

But another and different fate was in store for the highwayman.

The conviction upon his mind was destined to be realised.

He was in good truth taking his last look of that scene.

It cost him a great effort finally to tear himself away, but the time for departure came, and could not be delayed.

Returning to the cottage, he placed in the hands of the good woman all the money that he possessed.

The amount was considerable; but he gave it all to her without reserve, save and except that he bound her to tend Maud's grave as the other graves were tended, and to cause to be placed at the head of it a stone inscribed simply with the name of "Maud."

Inexpressibly mournful was this last duty, and more than once Dick felt as though he should break down under it.

It was therefore more with the view of concealing the emotion which he could no longer repress that he took his departure in a hasty manner.

On reaching the beach, however, he found the fisherman waiting for him.

The tide then was just upon the turn.

A little delay was caused in getting Black Bess aboard the boat.

For the first time, she seemed reluctant and unwilling to obey her master's bidding.

Rightly or wrongly, Dick ascribed it to the fact that she missed Maud, and was undesirous to proceed without being able to comprehend the reason of it.

This may have been only a fancy on the part of the highwayman; but it pleased him.

Had he felt disposed to chide his mare for her disobedience his emotion would not have suffered him to do so.

At last, however, Black Bess entered the boat; but having done so, she seemed to look back to the shore with a glance as wistful as her master's.

Gradually the shore receded from their view; and as it grew more and more distant, Dick's heaviness of heart increased; and when at length darkness set in, and when there was no fear that he should be observed, Dick sank down to the bottom of the boat and gave way unrestrainedly to his grief—a grief a thousand times more poignant than any he had suffered in all the vicissitudes of his life.

CHAPTER MLXXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN VERY UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS HIMSELF IN THE MIDST OF HIS FOES.

THE coast of England was gained in safety.

How long a period of time the voyage had occupied Dick Turpin knew not.

All the time he remained in the position we have just described—that is to say, crouching down in the boat in an attitude of overwhelming grief.

The fisherman, actuated by friendly motives, spoke to him once or twice, but no answer was returned.

The sudden jerk caused by the boat running on to the beach aroused him, however, and, with a powerful effort, he shook off the reflections that had weighed him down, and prepared himself to perform those duties which lay before him.

Springing from the boat with a swiftness and readiness that surprised the fisherman, Dick prepared to get Black Bess on shore.

This was done without much trouble, and, the boat having been hastily secured, they made their way towards the cottage.

"I cannot linger here," said Dick Turpin, "for every moment is of value. Still, I must fulfil the promise that I made to you. Can you obtain a horse?"

"There is a little inn not very far away," replied the fisherman, "where I might hire one."

"Then go at once. Be careful to say nothing about the purpose for which you require it. I will wait for you here. Be speedy," he added, as the man started off. "I shall be full of impatience till you return."

Dick did not enter the cottage, but remained on the beach gazing at his noble steed.

Now that Maud had passed away, the tie that bound them together was drawn closer.

Black Bess was now the highwayman's dearest friend.

In spite, however, of his affection for her, his eyes very often looked yearningly across the vast expanse of dark, rolling water, and as he did so his heart would swell almost to bursting, for this was the first great grief that he had known, and therefore it was more deeply felt.

Although the fisherman made good speed, the time seemed terribly long until he returned; yet it was quite as well that this delay occurred, for it allowed the day to close in.

It was, however, little more than dusk when the pair set out in the direction of Stonehenge.

Dick was unconscious of the great amount of danger he was running, for he knew nothing of the movements of the police officers.

These individuals were, however, with a great deal of perseverance, searching in every direction for the highwaymen, and leaving descriptions of them at every habitation they perceived.

Had he known all this, Dick would scarcely have rode along the highway with so much indifference.

This bold course, as often happens, proved a safe one, for the old Druids' Stones were reached without the occurrence of any incident whatever.

Going, then, to that place where the booty had been deposited, Dick unearthed it.

The amount he placed in the hands of the fisherman far exceeded all expectation; but then it was not likely that Dick would underpay the person who had rendered him such a service.

The remainder of the wealth Dick bestowed about him, for he judged this would be the more prudent course, as who could tell what sudden emergency might arise?

The fisherman, having uttered a thousand protestations of gratitude, rode back to his humble dwelling, while Dick resolved to remain in his present quarters for a little while, in order that his mare might have food and rest.

It seemed a strange spot to choose for a resting-place; but then Dick judged that of all others it would be the one where the officers were least likely to look for him.

While speculating upon the possible whereabouts of his comrades, however, Dick little thought that scarcely twenty-four hours had elapsed since Tom King stood within a few yards of him.

Like Tom King, Dick Turpin, after some reflection, felt that London was the place where he would be most likely to hear tidings of the rest, and he resolved to make his way there with as little loss of time as possible.

Having once made this determination, he found it the most difficult thing in the world to restrain his impatience so far as to enable him to stay as long as he had intended.

For himself rest was out of the question.

He tried in vain to close his eyes in sleep—indeed, so great was his agitation that he was compelled to pace up and down like some wild animal chafing at confinement.

Long before it was dark, then, he was on his way to London.

With the utmost assurance he continued to keep on the highway.

He knew full well that this was the most direct road, and also that his mare would not be so fatigued in journeying along it as she would be if he attempted to take her across the country.

Plunged in deep thought, he paid but slight attention to what was going on around him, nor did he seem conscious of the rapid approach of darkness.

But he was destined to be aroused from his reverie in a manner more startling than agreeable.

All at once his ears were assailed by a loud shout.

There could be no mistaking the tone of it.

It was a shout of surprise.

It was enough to make Dick look around him hastily, and as he did so a loud ejaculation escaped his lips.

He found, to his great surprise, that he was exactly in front of an inn of considerable extent.

The house lay at some little distance back from the high-road, and round the door a number of mounted men were clustered.

It did not require a second glance to prove that they were police officers.

Apparently they had halted there merely that they might take some hasty refreshment while in the saddle.

It was from them the shout of surprise had come, and the cause of it was the sudden and unexpected appearance of the highwayman.

"Dick Turpin," roared one of them, in accents of amazement, as soon as the shout of astonishment had died away—"Dick Turpin and Black Bess, by all that's d—nable!"

But before he had reached the conclusion of this ejaculatory speech the object of it had taken the alarm and was flying along the high-road at a speed which seemed to promise to make pursuit a hopeless matter.

Nevertheless, the police officers hastily dropped the jugs from which they had been drinking, while the one in command threw down some pieces of silver for the reckoning.

"Now, my boys," he said, "off and away! It is a long time since we had a chance of doing anything, so do not let us miss the present opportunity. Try your best. Now, then, forward—forward!"

This urging seemed, however, to be scarcely necessary, for the men, without exception, seemed full of anxiety to capture the highwayman.

They were, too, in the best of spirits.

Their horses were in good condition, having had a long rest, during which they had been well attended to.

They consequently seemed to stand a good chance of effecting their object.

As we have seen, Dick Turpin's astonishment lasted but a second.

The first thing he did upon recovering himself was to give Black Bess a sudden impulse forwards.

Gallantly was that impulse obeyed, and it was with a sudden thrill of pleasure that Dick thought of the splendid qualities of his matchless steed.

That exhilaration of the spirits which cannot fail to be felt while riding rapidly under circumstances of excitement soon told upon Dick.

For the moment all was forgotten.

His eyes brightened.

His breath came thick and short, while the warm blood leaped with a tingling motion through his veins.

He was dominated by an intense and ungovernable excitement.

Once again he felt himself the bold dashing knight of the road, fearing no danger, no matter how great, and laughing to scorn all attempts at pursuit.

But, despite the great speed that Bess made, the police officers could still be heard—though faintly—in the rear.

"They are better mounted than I could have believed," he muttered, as he glanced behind him.

But the darkness was too great to enable him to see far.

The unmistakable sound, however, produced by the concussion of many horses' feet upon the hard highway still came to his ears.

"They will try their hardest," he muttered to himself; "but it will be in vain. They have lent me a little stimulus, and the result probably will be that I shall reach London sooner than I should have done had I been left to myself."

The speed at which Black Bess was going, though a very rapid one, was, nevertheless, of such a character as she could maintain for a considerable length of time without much distress to herself.

But when several miles had been passed over in this manner Dick Turpin's first excitement abated, and he began to think with greater calmness upon the nature of his position.

"No, no," he said to himself, as he tightened the reins—"it won't do to keep up this kind of thing, for, if I do,

the probability is that I shall enter London with the police officers after me like a pack of wolves! No, no—that will not answer."

Black Bess, feeling the check upon her bridle, very willingly obeyed it.

Her pace grew slower and slower until it reduced itself almost to a walk.

Dick was thinking.

Slight, however, as was the delay thus caused, it was of manifest advantage to the police officers, who still pushed on at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

Very faintly, but still growing louder and louder each moment, could be heard the hoofbeats of their horses in the distance.

"I must give them the slip," said Dick, again speaking half aloud. "It will be by far the wisest course; and yet how am I to accomplish it? What stratagem can I make use of that will be effectual? It must be something out of the ordinary course, for, rely upon it, they will not suffer themselves to be very easily thrown off the scent. What can it be? Thought eludes me! I do not feel capable of that invention which once came so readily to me. How they come on! Let it be how it will, some greater distance must be placed between them and me than there is already—nothing can be done in such close quarters as these. I will try another gallop. That, perhaps, may clear my brain of the vapours that now overcloud it. At any rate, by getting further off I shall be better able to put into execution whatever I may decide upon. Forward, Bess, old lass—forward once again, and give them a taste of your rare mettle!"

CHAPTER MLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN CONCEIVES A VERY CLEVER SCHEME FOR ELUDING THE POLICE OFFICERS.

It often happened that Black Bess obeyed the bare words of command, as she did in this case.

To all appearance she understood the words that were addressed to her, but probably the fact was she understood from the tone of her master's voice what it was that he required her to do.

When wishing her to make good speed, Dick always spoke in a lively and encouraging manner, and it was rarely that anything more was needed.

Having perfect confidence in her, he allowed the reins to lie quite loosely upon her neck, for in the matter of avoiding obstacles of all description he relied more upon her matchless instinct than upon the quickness of his own vision.

Never had Black Bess appeared to be in better condition.

Away she flew along the broad, well-kept high-road, with the ease and swiftness of a greyhound.

Very soon indeed did it become impossible to catch the least sound of his foes, but Dick kept on.

He was anxious to have the best possible opportunity to carry anything he might resolve upon into effect.

His brain was busily at work, but as yet his mind had failed him.

It did indeed seem as though he had lost that faculty upon which in times gone past he had so prided himself.

All at once Black Bess changed her position from the middle of the road to one side of it.

The darkness was so great that Dick could not see what had caused her to make this sudden movement.

By dint of straining his eyes, however, he made out a dark-looking object, which immediately resolved itself into a covered van, or, rather, cart, for it had but two wheels.

This vehicle was drawn swiftly and smoothly along by a powerful horse.

Dick was past it in a second of time, but before he had gone many hundreds of yards in advance he pulled up.

A thought had at last occurred to him.

It had been suggested by the cart.

The nature of it will soon be seen.

At present it was an idea merely, and it was impossible to say whether it could be carried into effect until the cart arrived.

For this event Dick waited with much impatience.

A rumbling sound soon assailed his ears, and finally, after the lapse of a few moments, the vehicle reached him.

"Hoy—boy!" Dick bawled, in a loud voice. "Stop—stop, I say!—stop a moment! Hoy—boy!" His summons was heard, and the covered cart was brought to a standstill.

"Dang me," said a voice, "if I did not think it was a highwayman! Not that it would have signified if it had been, because, you see, I am not such a fool as to travel with anything worth taking. He, he!"

"A very wise precaution," assented Dick.

"Yes—yes! I ax your pardon, sir, for having had such thoughts about you, sir, seeing as how you're a genelman. He, he!"

The person in the cart was evidently facetiously inclined.

Dick rode closer to the vehicle.

"I have stopped you," said Dick, "in order that I may ask you a question of great importance to yourself."

"Well, that's cool, at any rate! What may this question be?"

Dick spoke in a deliberate tone, for he wished to make an impression.

"I want to know whether you have any objection to earning a couple of hundred pounds in the next hour or so?"

"Eh?—what?" ejaculated the man, amazed in no slight degree. "Just be good enough to say that over again, will you?"

Dick complied, and, if anything, his voice was more deliberate and emphatic.

"It seems pretty clear," he replied, "that you take me for a d—d fool."

"How so?"

"Why, you must, or you would never ask me such a question."

"Then you are willing?"

"Certainly! But," he exclaimed, all at once, as though struck with a fresh thought, "you don't want me to commit murder, do you?"

"Certainly not!" said Dick, who could not help laughing at the tone of extreme anxiety the man employed.

"Nor rob, nor fire a rick, nor—"

"Nothing that you need fear any after consequences from."

"I'm your man, then. What is it?"

"Listen attentively."

"Don't be afraid about that."

"I want you, then, to take your horse out of the cart, unharness it, and turn it into that nice meadow over the hedge yonder. Do you understand that?"

"Well, I know what you want me to do, but as for understanding why it is to be done—"

"There is no occasion for you to trouble yourself about that—you shall know more in good time."

"Very good. What next?"

"You will then put the harness on my mare here—I think it will fit—and put her into the shafts."

"Put that mare of yours into my cart?"

"Just so."

"And what then?"

"Continue your journey."

"And what about my horse?"

"That will be safe enough in the meadow till you have the opportunity to come back and fetch it."

"And what should you do?"

"Ride with you in the cart."

"Where to?"

"Only just along the high-road."

"How far, though?"

"A mile or two."

"And what else?"

"That's all."

"All?" repeated the man, incredulously.

"Everything."

"But you don't mean to say that you are willing to pay a couple of hundred pounds for having that done, do you?"

"I am not only willing, but quite ready."

"Then there must be more in it than I am aware of."

"Undoubtedly there is."

"Then let me know it, or I'm off. I never buy a pig in a poke, as the saying is."

Dick debated for a moment within himself as to whether he should take this man into his confidence.

It would be a great risk to do so; but at the same time Dick felt that, could his plan be efficiently carried out, he would have an excellent chance of escape.

From the man's manner of speaking, too, Dick felt tempted to trust him.

What also weighed greatly with him was, that if this man did undertake it there was no doubt about his ability to play his part well.

"Well, guv'nor," interrupted the man, "how do you bring in the verdict?"

"I will trust you."

"Very good."

"Fully and entirely trust you."

"So much the better."

"In a word, then, I am pursued by police officers—they are hard upon my track, and by doing what I have just said I shall be able to escape them easily."

"I see now. And you are?"

"I may as well tell you, for half confidences are more dangerous than whole ones."

"True again."

"Then I am commonly known as Dick Turpin."

"Blest if I did not think so!" answered the man, without displaying any of that astonishment which the highwayman thought the announcement would call forth.

"You thought so?"

"Yes."

"And why, pray?"

"Why, by the looks of the mare of yours; and, besides, what you have proposed is just like one of your tricks."

"Well, be it so. Tell me whether you feel inclined to take two hundred pounds from me or not."

"I should not hesitate a moment," was the reply, "if I could make sure that I should get into no trouble about it afterwards."

"I don't think there is any need for fear. But you must make up your mind quickly, or I shall have them in sight."

The man considered for a moment or two; but the prospect of coming into possession of so large a sum as two hundred pounds overcame the scruples of prudence.

"In for a penny in for a pound," he cried at length. "I'll take you."

"Agreed," said Dick; and the very moment he pronounced the word he slipped from the saddle.

The man was not long in descending, and between them the horse was unharnessed and taken out of the cart in a very brief space of time.

Dick was in high spirits, for, having obtained the man's consent, he made sure of being able to baffle his foes.

As rapidly as possible he took off Black Bess's saddle and bridle, and threw them into the back of the cart.

While he was thus occupied the man took his horse by the forelock and led him through a gate into a meadow on the right-hand side of the road.

"There," he said, as he fastened the gate again, "you ought not to grumble at this little arrangement, for you are clearly a gainer by it."

The horse seemed to think so; for, as if to testify his satisfaction, he kicked up his heels and vanished into the darkness in a moment.

Nothing now remained but to put the harness on to Black Bess and place her in the shafts.

This did not take long, for the noble creature seemed to know that what her master most wanted of her then was docility.

It was really wonderful to notice how different Black Bess looked when harnessed to the cart.

The great, clumsy trappings formed for her an effectual disguise, and in the darkness there was little fear that the officers would be able to recognise her.

Dick Turpin was delighted beyond measure.

"Capital," he said, as he patted his mare upon the neck—"capital! We shall do the officers nicely! And hark! As I live, they are coming; we have not a moment to lose!"

The man listened.

"I can't hear them," he said.

"Very likely not; but then you must remember that you are not so well practised in listening as I am. If we linger here we shall hear them more than is desirable."

Dick climbed up into the cart, and the man hastened to follow him.

"Will you drive?"

"No," answered the highwayman; "I will get to the back of the cart and cover myself up with the straw; at the same time, I shall be able to look out at the back."

"Very good."

Black Bess showed herself quite tractable and quiet in harness.

No sooner did the man take hold of the reins than she jogged off as though she had never been used to any other employment in her life.

The canvas at the back of the cart consisted of a couple of flaps, and though these were tied together, yet space enough was left to allow Dick to peep through.

The cart rolled along at such a rate that Dick was obliged to say:—

"Don't drive so fast, or you will excite their suspicions."

"Very good, though I do like to be behind a horse that can go."

Their speed was now somewhat diminished, and in consequence the sound made by the officers' horses could again be heard.

More and more distinct it became, and Dick was sure that they would overtake the cart in less than a quarter of an hour.

Just as he made the reflection the man called out to him.

"What is amiss?"

"Oh! nothing, only you have not told me what I shall say to the officers in case they should speak to me."

"Well thought of. The simplest thing will be to declare that no one answering my description has passed you, and, of course, they will conclude that I have made my way across the country."

CHAPTER MLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS THAT HE IS BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

"Just as you please," replied the man. "You may depend that if it is agreeable to you it will suit me."

"Well, then, I am anxious to get to London as soon as ever I can, though I don't want to get there with a pack of officers behind me."

"I understand. And if you can once give them the slip you will push on along the road as fast as you are able?"

"Exactly."

"Well, all I can say is that it is a capital plan, and it ought to succeed."

"We shall soon know. The officers will be almost sure to stop you and make inquiries. You must be very careful, for if you excite their suspicions it will be all over with me."

"Oh, you leave Joseph to that. I was born before the middle of last week—I suppose you know that?"

"Yes; if I hadn't I should not have trusted you so far as I have already."

Dick now once more betook himself to his look-out at the back, for the sounds of the officers' approach became unmistakable.

Still, the darkness was too profound to permit him at present to get even a glimpse of them.

It was impossible for this state of things to continue very long, however.

The officers, as far as could be judged by the sound, were coming on as swiftly as ever.

At length, like a darkness, Dick could distinguish them behind him.

He now began to feel conscious that, in the event of anything going wrong, his position was a very ticklish one.

Discovery would, in point of fact, be fatal to him.

It was this reflection that led the highwayman to ask himself whether he was not placing more confidence in this man than was justifiable.

Suppose he should play him false?

The probability was a terrible one to contemplate, and yet it was impossible for Turpin to close his eyes to it. Indeed, the nearer the officers came the more did it obtrude itself.

He had no guarantee whatever of the man's fidelity, and the temptation to betray him was very great.

Not only was there the very considerable amount of the reward, but he held possession of Black Bess; and to a man fond of a good horse, the hope of being able to secure her would perhaps prove to be the greatest temptation of all.

"I won't leave the power all in his hands," muttered Dick, conclusively; "I will at least have some warrant for the safety of my life."

Just as Dick Turpin arrived at this determination the police officers came fairly into view.

Not only were the forms of themselves and the horses visible, but even their accoutrements could be distinguished.

"Joseph—Joseph!" whispered Dick.

"Hullo, captain!"

"Hush—hush! Speak low! The officers are close behind us!"

"All right. But you startled me a bit. The fact is, I was thinking."

It might have been the highwayman's fancy, but the driver appeared to manifest no little confusion or embarrassment.

"I have been thinking too," answered Dick, in a significant tone.

"Have you, captain?"

"Yes. Do you feel that?"

"Lor, yes! What is it?"

"A pistol!"

"Don't—don't!"

"Silence, I say! Just listen a moment, will you!"

"I can't with that horrid thing touching me. It's just like ice!"

Dick removed the pistol, though he took care to hold it so that it would be ready for immediate use.

"Now, I don't want to say anything unpleasant, you know," he whispered; "and you will forgive me for thinking that perhaps the idea had occurred to you that you might be able to make a better bargain than you have already."

"What do you mean, captain?"

"Why, simply as a mere matter of self-defence, I shall take such means as will effectually prevent you from giving the officers a hint that I am in the cart with you."

"But, captain, you don't think that of me, do you?"

"I should be sorry to have a bad opinion of anyone," answered Dick, "but in the present case my life compels me to adopt every precaution. Do you understand?"

"Quite."

"Then I am sure you will not take it amiss of me if I hold this loaded pistol ready in my hand, like this."

"There is no occasion."

"I hope there may not be; still," added Dick Turpin, in a resolute and even menacing tone, "if I have the least suspicion that you are about to play me false I'll blow the top of your skull off, and with as little hesitation as I should have in killing a sparrow. Those who know me best invariably give me credit for being as good as my word, and fear not that I shall make this matter an exception."

The man shuddered.

"Dang me!" he said. "If I'd a known I was going to drive with a loaded pistol at my back I would have seen you at the bottom of the Red Sea before you should have got into the cart at all!"

"If you mean well by me, you have nothing whatever to fear—you will be quite uninjured. If anything unpleasant takes place, you will have none save yourself to blame. But, hush! the officers are here—not another word! Remember what I told you. In answer to all their questions merely say that no one answering to my description has passed you on the road."

It was high time now to be silent, for the police were so near that there was great danger of their discovering that the cart was occupied by two persons should a word be uttered in a louder tone than a whisper.

Not more than a minute elapsed after this when some one called out, in a loud voice:

"Hullo, there! Pull up, will you?—pull up, in the King's name!"

The driver now brought Black Bess to a standstill.

The vital moment had now arrived.

It was scarcely possible for any human being in Dick's position to preserve anything resembling ordinary calmness.

The slightest thing would have served to discover him.

If the officers, prompted by suspicion or otherwise, merely glanced into the cart, his detection must have followed.

All he could do was to remain profoundly still and await the issue of events.

No sooner was the vehicle stopped than a police officer rode close up to it.

The others clustered around at a short distance, so that Dick might be said literally to be surrounded by his foes.

Certainly many of them were within an arm's-length of him.

"How far have you travelled?" asked the officer, in a hectoring voice.

"What do you want to know that for?"

"I demand the information in the name of the King."

"Very well, then, since you must know, I come from Meadbrook."

"Oh, ah! Meadbrook. Well, as you have been driving along the high-road, did you notice a man pass you riding on a black horse, and going at a violent gallop?"

"No."

"You have not?"

"I have not," answered the man, firmly, for the pistol behind him was prominent in his imagination.

"But perhaps you have been asleep?"

"It isn't likely."

"Then are you perfectly certain that no such person has passed you to-night?"

"Perfectly certain."

This answer evidently was a very different one to what the officers had expected, and produced no little confusion.

A consultation was immediately held.

Dick overheard the greater part.

"I told you so, sir," said some one, in a positive tone of voice—"something seemed to strike me that as soon as he got out of our sight he would make his way across the open country instead of keeping to the high-road."

"Then, if you thought so," rejoined the chief officer, "why the devil couldn't you say so at the time? What the devil is the good of telling us now it is too late?"

"I did not like to take the responsibility."

"D—n your scruples! You might have given your opinion."

"What do you think we had better set about doing? If we stay here long the scent will grow quite cold."

"I am afraid it's cold already," was the reply. "I should like to know whether anyone has a proposition to make?"

"I can't help thinking that he kept to the high-road," said another.

"But how could he have done so without being seen by the driver of this cart?"

"Perhaps it was made worth his while not to see."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Officer," cried Joseph, "if you insinuates anything agen me, blowed if I don't get out of my cart and punch your head!"

"Don't be a fool!" said the chief officer. "Drive on. We will keep you company till you get to the inn yonder, and then we shall soon find out whether you have spoken the truth or not."

Having received this permission, the man set his cart in motion.

The officers rode along with it after the fashion of a guard of honour.

Dick was not aware of the proximity of any inn until the officer had alluded to the fact; and what had just been said by no means tended to make him feel easy in his mind.

He was just congratulating himself upon having got off so well when the inn was mentioned.

There was no help for it, however.

Being quite powerless, all he could do was to resign himself to Fortune.

Luckily for him, he was not destined to remain long in suspense.

With a sudden jerk, the cart a moment or two afterwards stopped in front of the inn.

Dick would have given much for the power to take a peep about him, but this was impossible.

Concentrating all his faculties into that of listening, he waited to hear what would next be said.

Some little confusion seemed to be going on in front of the roadside inn, and Dick afterwards found that the cause of this was that another troop of officers, who had come from the opposite direction, had stopped there to bait their horses.

Dick drew a long breath, and congratulated himself upon his narrow escape.

Had he not put his cleverly-conceived stratagem into execution nothing could have saved him from riding full tilt into this fresh party, and then his chances of ultimate escape would have been slight indeed.

But events were fated to fall out otherwise.

"We shall know the truth now," said the officer who had proposed making a halt at the inn.

"Yes, yes—to be sure we shall."

Then, addressing himself to the officer in command of this second troop, he asked:

"Any news of Dick Turpin?"

"Divil a bit!" was the reply, given in so strong a brogue as to leave no doubt upon the subject of the speaker's nationality.

"I hope you believe me now," said Joseph, triumphantly. "If he had gone this way the officers must have seen him."

"Why do you ask, my jewel?" continued the officer belonging to the second troop. "Have you had any luck now?"

"We caught sight of Dick Turpin," was the reply.

"Tare and ouns!"

"We gave chase, and thought we had him on the road before us; but it seems pretty certain that he has given us the slip somehow."

"And what's that man in the cart to do wid it? Who's in there?"

"Oh, nothing! He told us Dick Turpin had not passed him, but we did not know what to do about believing him."

"But you believe me now, don't you?" asked Joseph, triumphantly.

"Yes."

"And I may drive on, I suppose?"

"Yes—if you like. What the devil do you want bothering me for?"

"Don't lose your temper, my friend," returned Joseph, imperturbably.

Then he added:

"Good night, gentlemen all. I wish you luck."

With these words he drove off.

Dick ventured to shift his position a little, and looked out at the back.

He could see the officers in front of the inn quite plainly; and it was perhaps merely his excited fancy which made him think that several officers gave suspicious glances at the retreating vehicle.

CHAPTER MLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN UNEXPECTEDLY RECEIVES SOME VERY IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE.

NOT for long, however, was Dick allowed to have even this partial glimpse of his foes.

A sudden bend in the high-road hid the inn completely, and so he was deprived of the opportunity of ascertaining whether his suspicions were well or ill-founded.

He listened for a little while, but finding all was silent, he ventured to draw a long breath upon finding himself out of so dangerous a position.

As for Joseph, he protested himself to be vastly pleased with the result of his stratagem, to the success of which he declared his own cleverness tended in no slight degree.

Dick ventured to uncock his pistol and to replace it in his pocket.

"Captain," said Joseph, desecring Dick's action, "I am heartily glad to see that ugly-looking thing out of the way. It was too bad of you to distrust me—I did not deserve it."

"So it seems. Give me your hand—there. And now forgive me for my doubts, which, groundless as they were, you cannot blame me for feeling."

"All right—all right: don't say another word about it. I rather think we are out of our difficulty now."

"I hope so."

"Don't you think we are?"

"Well, it is doubtful."

"But what do you think of doing, captain—and how am I to get my horse back?"

"Never mind that now—your horse will be all right, and I shall want you to let me ride in your cart a mile or two further yet."

"Very good."

"You say you like to be behind an animal that can go don't you?"

"Rather!"

"Then for the next twenty minutes the wheels of this cart will go round faster than ever they have gone before."

"You are going to put Black Bess upon her mettle?"

"Yes, and without distressing her either."

"And you will let me hold the reins?"

"Yes. Slacken them. That will do nicely."

The moment the man complied with these directions, Dick gave his old signal to his mare.

Before the sound had well-nigh left his lips, away she went at a pace that made their former speed seem miserably slow, although, as may be supposed, it was pretty considerable.

Joseph was so amazed and, withal, so delighted that he could do nothing but sit breathless and speechless holding the reins.

So terrific was the speed that the wheels seemed to bound from the road.

Sparks flew and stones were scattered on every side.

The cart was but ill adapted for such rapid locomotion, being very deficient in the matter of springs, so that it was by no means comfortable to sit in it.

Dick, however, just then was not very studious about comfort.

All he wanted was to get away from his foes as quickly as he was able—so that he could, indeed, make after pursuit utterly useless.

As for Joseph, he was in his element.

This furious rate was kept up for something like the period Dick had mentioned, and by that time, the reader may be sure, they had rattled over many miles.

Wishing now to resume the saddle, Turpin spoke to Black Bess, and in a moment she reduced her speed until it became a very gentle trot.

"Astonishing!" ejaculated Joseph. "You have got her under rare command, captain, and no mistake! Ah," he added, with a sigh, "what wouldn't I give for such a creature!"

The highwayman hardly liked the tone in which these last words were pronounced, but of course he made no allusion to the circumstance.

Leaning forward in the cart, he looked out right and left of him for a narrow turning down which he could drive for a few yards, so as to have the opportunity of removing Black Bess from the shafts without being seen by anyone who might chance to pass by.

Joseph seemed to guess his intention, for he remarked, rather hastily:

"Captain, do you know that I am within a couple of miles of my journey's end, which is the next market town we come to? Now, if you would drive to there before you took your mare out it would make a great difference to me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; do you see, I should do my business, and borrow a horse from a friend, who would ride back with me in the cart until we got to the meadow where mine is, and then he would ride horseback to the town again."

While speaking these words, Joseph displayed so much eagerness, while seeming to suppress all symptoms of such a thing, that Dick's suspicions were revived with full force.

"Perhaps he has some deep-laid plan in his mind to attempt my capture," thought the highwayman to himself; "and yet I may do him a great injustice by harbouring such thoughts. At any rate, I will not run the risk."

Having arrived at this determination, he said, significantly:

"I shall pay you so liberally for the service you have done me so far that you will think nothing of the incon-

venience of being left no more than two miles from your destination."

"Then you won't take me, captain?"

"I prefer not to do so. Just turn down that dark lane there on the left; we shall be nicely out of sight there."

Without another word, and without manifesting the least hesitation, Joseph obeyed the mandate.

The lane was narrow and miry, so that Dick soon had the vehicle brought to a standstill.

The task of taking Black Bess out of the shafts, and reinvesting her with saddle and bridle was very quickly performed; and then Turpin's next course was to produce some of the money of which he had about him so plentiful a store.

That he treated Joseph liberally the reader may be sure, for Turpin was about the last man on earth to under-rate any service that was performed for him.

The amount, indeed, evidently exceeded the expectations which Joseph had formed himself.

"I shall leave you to look after yourself," were the highwayman's parting words. "I know very well that you are capable of doing so, but still, let me caution you, for your sake, not to let the police officers surmise what share you have had in my escape to-night."

With the last word on his lips, Dick rode away, leaving Joseph standing in the lane and looking very much as though he was in doubt of the reality of what had lately passed.

Turpin's intention was to push on with unabated speed, for Black Bess did not at present show any effects whatever from the exertions already made.

The course decided upon accorded well with Dick's own impatience; and not only that, it rendered him still safer so far as regarded those officers who were on the road behind him.

Ere long, however, he became sensible that Black Bess would be all the better for a brief rest and some slight refreshment, and accordingly he began to look about him for a roadside inn.

The hour was very late, and he had grave doubts as to whether he should find a place open.

Just, however, as he was making this reflection, he perceived a glimmering light ahead of him and hastened towards it.

As he had hoped, he found it to be just the place he was so anxious to meet with.

On a nearer approach, too, it became evident that he had arrived in the very nick of time, for a man was engaged in fastening the shutters.

This individual hearing the sound of a horse's feet, came forwards and proved to be the ostler.

All around was so perfectly quiet and apparently so free from alarm that Dick was tempted to alight.

He allowed his mare only a little hay, with some water with which had been mixed a small quantity of brandy.

"Now a whisp of hay," he exclaimed, taking hold of a handful.

He began rubbing Black Bess thoroughly from head to foot; and while he was thus engaged the ostler, pretending to be very indifferent, walked with his lantern towards the horse-trough.

Turpin did not pay any particular attention to his movements.

Had he done so, he would have seen the ostler hold the lantern close to a part of the great pump which was much whiter than the rest of the wood of which it was composed.

From time to time the ostler glanced towards Dick, who, having finished rubbing his mare down, comprehended what was going forward.

"Here," he said, "come and take your reckoning."

"I knows you," said the ostler, in an excited voice, and raising his lantern while he spoke.

"Then you have the advantage of me," answered the highwayman, carelessly.

"I wish I had!" was the muttered response. "Dick Turpin," he added, in a louder voice, "the officers are after you."

"Thank you! I was slightly aware of the fact," was the provokingly cool rejoinder.

"There's a bill up offering a reward for you at every inn and public place on this road. There are hundreds of people on the look-out for you."

"Then they will take a great deal of trouble without

any profit to themselves, unless they should happen to possess an uncommon share of good sense, as I think you do."

"What do you mean?" asked the ostler, full of curiosity.

"Simply that here is a twenty-pound note for you, and all I want you to do in return for it is to know nothing at all about me."

"Right, captain," was the reply. "Give us the money, and trust to my honour; and to prove that I don't mean bad by you I will give you a little information that may prove valuable."

"Thanks. What is it?"

The ostler, having examined the bank-note by the insufficient aid of the lantern, folded it up carefully and placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

Then, lowering his voice, he said:

"Captain, I don't know whether you are aware of it, but there is a party of more than twenty police officers on the road before you."

"Before me? Are you sure?"

"Quite. They were all here not more than half an hour ago, and I heard them saying to each other that they intended to keep on quietly in the direction of London, making inquiries all along the road."

This was indeed important intelligence, and true beyond a doubt.

Dick stopped, uncertain what to do.

The ostler appeared to have a tolerably good idea of what was passing through his mind, for he said:

"Look here, captain, if you don't mind another flimsy I can tell you something much better worth your knowing still—that is if, as I suppose, you want to get to London."

The highwayman did not think it worth while to waste time by uttering any reply.

His sole answer was to produce a second bank-note of the same value as the first, and place it between the ostler's extended fingers.

It was perfectly well understood.

"Captain," he said, "I know the officers have taken the high-road. Well, you must know that there is, at a little more than three-parts of a mile from here, a turning. It is a cross-road, in fact."

"Well?"

"The turning is on the right-hand side as you go from here. Now, captain, if you will take that turning, and make good speed, you will be able to get in advance of your foes."

"Can it be possible?"

"It is perfectly true."

"But how—how?"

"Why, this cross-country road brings you out on the London Road many miles from here—in fact, I should think the distance saved is pretty nigh five miles, for the road goes cornerwise, you understand."

"The road is much used, then?"

"No—scarcely at all."

"How is that?"

"Why, people prefer the highway, especially at night, and the cross-road I am telling you of is very dark, by the reason that it goes for some distance through a very dense wood; then again, for the first mile or two, the ground underfoot is very bad, though it improves afterwards; but the chief reason is that, many years ago, every traveller who went that way was robbed, and several were murdered into the bargain. At last the robber was taken, and hung in chains near the scene of his crimes, which is about the most dismal part of all the road."

"I suppose so," said Dick, musingly.

"Of course, captain, you would think no more about such a thing as that than I should, and I would go that way alone and on foot at any hour of the day or night."

Although he did not confess it or even hint such a thing, the ostler's narration raised anything but comfortable thoughts in Dick's mind.

"And do you really believe," he said "that I can actually get on in advance of these officers that you tell me are now in front?"

"I am sure you can—unless all I have heard about your mare, Black Bess, is a jumped-up lie. Take my advice, captain, and try it. Any way, it will save you a good five miles, and that ought to be considered in a long journey."

"Certainly it ought."

Be off with you, then—don't waste another minute."

"You are sure the officers have not taken that way?"

"Quite sure—they know nothing about the road, and the entrance to it is so narrow and dark, that unless you keep a good look-out you will ride by without seeing it."

"Dick Turpin," cried a loud voice, with startling suddenness, "I know you, and have heard all! Surrender!"

The voice came from the inn, and, turning in the direction of the sound, Dick caught sight of the figure of a man.

Turpin merely laughed.

But there was a flash and a loud report; but as Black Bess had just set herself in motion, her rider and herself were quite unhurt.

"Away—away!" he cried.

Then, turning to look back, he saw that all the inmates of the inn appeared to be aroused.

"If you want me you will have to catch me!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

Black Bess gave a few prodigious bounds, which had the effect of carrying her out of sight of the inn in a moment.

CHAPTER MLXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN MEETS TOM KING AT OLD MATTHEW'S IN DRURY LANE.

As Dick Turpin was under no apprehension concerning whatever pursuit might be set on foot by the people at the roadside inn, he reduced his mare's speed, for he wanted a little quiet thought, a thing impossible of attainment when Black Bess was going at full speed.

If it could be relied on, the importance of the information given by the ostler could scarcely be over-estimated.

But could it be relied on?

That was the point.

Dick somehow felt doubtful and distrustful.

Suppose that this road he was advised to take should turn out to be an ambush, or perhaps lead him blindly into the arms of those he was anxious to avoid?

Long and anxious was the consultation which Dick held with himself.

If he could only have obtained some evidence confirmatory of what the ostler had said, the case would have been different, but this was what there seemed to be no probability of obtaining.

Turpin's indecision was, if anything, rather greater than otherwise when he reached the turning in question. The ostler had very correctly described it, for it was narrow, dark, and more than half concealed.

Judging by appearances, it must have been long since anyone had gone in that direction.

"I can at least tell whether the officers have gone down here," Dick muttered; and at the same moment he dismounted.

We have often stated that he never failed to carry about with him the means of procuring a light readily.

In a moment or so he had lighted a small lantern, which, nevertheless, emitted a bright though concentrated light.

By the aid this afforded Dick narrowly examined the ground at the entrance of the lane, or, rather, cross-road, and the result of his scrutiny was the conviction that no considerable body of mounted men had gone in that direction.

So far, then, the ostler had spoken truly; but yet Dick's suspicions were by no means allayed.

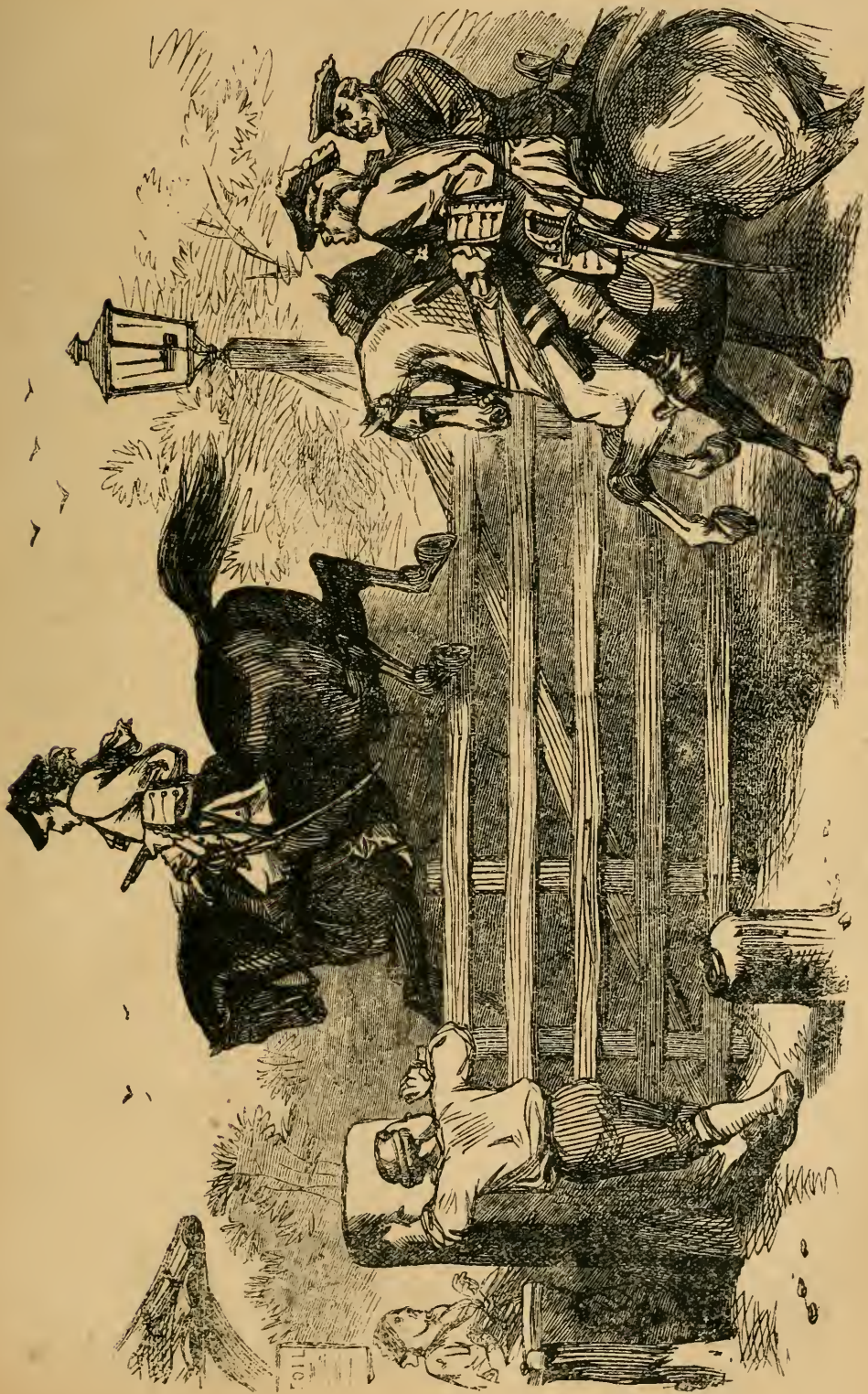
The lane, so far from communicating with the high-road, might have no outlet, in which case he might fall an easy prey to any officers who should follow him.

To remain in this state of hesitation, however, would never do, and, therefore, he hastened to come to a conclusion.

"I will go a little way in this direction," he said to himself, extinguishing the lamp and reseating himself in the saddle "and if I find that the appearance of the road does not correspond with the ostler's representations I will quit it and make my way across the country."

This resolution was no sooner formed than it was put into practice.

The lane being fenced in by masses of trees on both



[DICK TURPIN ON THE ROAD TO YORK.]

sides, was intensely dark; but Dick trusted to the finer instincts of his mare to keep him out of any danger that might lie in their path.

Black Bess galloped on apparently with the utmost confidence.

It was a terrible thing to be carried so swiftly through the darkness; but Dick did not attempt to check her speed.

All at once, however, he came to a spot which, when compared with the rest, seemed tolerably light.

He was just able to see about him.

Black Bess, with abated speed, went on, but kept drawing nearer to one side of the road.

Straining his eyes in the hope of being able to discern the cause of this, the highwayman perceived the gibbet of which the ostler had spoken.

It was not possible by the eye alone to make out the details of the object swinging from the short crossbeam, but imagination easily served to fill in the outlines.

A sickening feeling came over Dick's heart as he averted his eyes and urged his mare to make good speed past the loathsome spectacle.

No sooner was the gibbet behind her than Black Bess started off at a speed which seemed to be the effects of terror.

A considerable tract of open country now stretched far away on both sides of him, and the apprehensions in which Turpin had indulged almost if not entirely vanished.

Encouraged by the belief that he should, after all, succeed in getting in advance of the large troop of officers, he did not hesitate to push his mare onward, although morning now was not far distant.

But he judged that the officers, after having been on the road all night, would rest during the day at the first inn they came to after sunrise.

It was this belief that made him so anxious to make the best use of the time there was before him, in spite of the risk of doing so.

Every step he went now seemed to convince him that the ostler had acted towards him in perfectly good faith, and this made him hope that he would escape any dangerous consequences for having befriended him.

A dim gray light was visible in the east when Dick found himself in proximity to the London Road.

Considerable caution was now requisite, or he might precipitate that which he had been at so much pains to avoid.

He reconnoitred carefully before he ventured to emerge.

His joy may be perhaps understood when he saw that the coast before him was quite clear.

He drew from it the most favourable auguries of the success of the rest of his adventure.

And now, strangely enough, as he found himself apparently unmenaced by any pressing danger, that flow of spirits he had experienced suddenly ebbed away, and he once again became lifeless and dejected.

It really seemed as though, by some mysterious agency, Black Bess was acquainted with the change in her master's manner, for her head dropped, and she evinced unmistakable signs that the night's exertion had not failed to produce an effect upon her.

Great as was Dick's abstraction, it was not long before he noted this circumstance, and it awoke him to the necessity of finding good quarters for her somewhere during the approaching day.

But where was he to look for them?

How could he hope to find them on a road that had been so closely watched by the police officers?

Still, this was imperative if he wished to get rapidly to London.

He was anxiously debating upon the subject when the sun rose and the day fairly began.

Ere long the rural population would be abroad, and the appearance of a travel-stained rider and jaded steed could not fail to attract their special notice.

Yet no place holding forth the slightest prospect of safe shelter for a few hours could be described, although now objects could be distinguished afar off.

Dick's attention was distracted from the consideration of this difficulty by seeing a man some distance off riding upon a horse, or rather cob, which, despite its short, clumsy-looking make, was tearing over the ground at a gallop which few hunters could have equalled.

Dick's first thought was that this man was hurrying towards him with hostile intentions, and his hands involuntarily sought his pistols.

But before he drew one of these weapons from his belt he saw that his opinion was erroneous.

The man was coming towards him, it is true; but as he came nearer, Dick perceived readily enough that he was being carried along entirely against his will.

The cob, in fact, was running away, and apparently had the bit firmly between his teeth, so that it was impossible to check his mad career by tugging at the reins.

Dick stopped abruptly.

For the moment he forgot everything in the intense interest he felt in this fresh spectacle.

It was impossible for him to render any aid—all he could do was to remain a spectator.

The scene did not continue long, however.

A tall, quick-set hedge dividing the fields from the roadside came in the cob's way.

Either the animal was too terrified to see the obstacle, or else it thought it could be surmounted.

At any rate, on it came at undiminished speed; but when within a couple of yards from the hedge-row it stopped short, as though arrested by the powerful hand of some enchanter, planting its fore feet most doggedly upon the ground.

The result of this sudden stoppage can be imagined.

Away flew the rider over the horse's neck, executing a kind of half-somersault over the hedge, and finally dropping head foremost into the road.

Here he lay like one deprived of life, while the cob, as though quite unconscious of the mischief it had done, turned round and trotted composedly across the meadow.

All this happened with extreme rapidity.

Indeed, it seemed to Dick that not more than half a moment had elapsed since he first caught sight of the terrified animal.

Under such circumstances as those in which the highwayman was placed, he might have been pardoned if he had continued on his way.

But Dick was not so inhuman.

As soon as ever he recovered from the first shock of his surprise—and this was not long—he hastened to place himself at the side of the prostrate man.

His worst fears were not realised, for he found him recovering possession of his senses.

Dick did what he could to restore him, and when he had to some extent succeeded, the farmer—for such by his costume he appeared to be—broke out into violent maledictions, not launched at his preserver, but at the beast which had served him this scurvy trick.

"I don't know who you are, sir," he said, addressing Dick, after a moment or two had elapsed; "but you are a Christian, and I am much obliged for your kindness."

"Oh, don't mention such a trifle. I hope you are not much hurt."

"No—no," answered the farmer. "I fell clear on to my head, so I think there is not much the matter."

The satisfied tone in which this remark was made brought a smile to Dick's lips.

Having thus spoken, however, the farmer endeavoured to gain his feet, and, in the effort that he made, appeared to become sensible that he was more injured than he imagined.

Nevertheless, by Dick's assistance, he at length stood erect.

"I feel very dizzy about the upper storey," he remarked, placing his hand to his head; "but I shall get over that in a moment or two, I think."

But the farmer seemed to get worse.

"It is a thousand wonders you were not killed," remarked Dick. "Is there anything that I can do for you? If so, speak."

"Do you mean what you say?"

"Certainly."

"Then that emboldens me to utter a request which otherwise I should not think of making."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, if you would help me up on to your horse, and lead me home—it is only a little way from here—I shall be always indebted to you, for, to tell the truth, I am afraid I am more hurt than I thought at first."

"I hope not," said Dick; "but I comply with your request most readily."

"Many thanks. One of these days I hope I shall be able to return the obligation."

"You can easily do so at the present moment."

"How, sir?—my good sir, how so?" asked the farmer, eagerly, who by this time had succeeded in seating himself upon the back of Black Bess.

"Show me the way," answered Dick, "and I will tell you as we go along."

The farmer indicated the position of his house, and Dick, without an instant's delay, set off in that direction.

The farmer had a little difficulty in retaining his seat, for his brain reeled.

Still, he professed himself most anxious to become acquainted with Dick's request.

"I am journeying to London," said Turpin, "and have been travelling all night. When I saw you I was looking out for a place where I could find shelter for a few hours for myself and steed, so if you will not mind according me your hospitality for a little—"

The farmer interrupted him.

"You are welcome to the best my house affords," he said, heartily, "and doubly welcome. This is a poor favour to render in return, however."

"Not at all so—not at all so."

At this moment Dick came in sight of a substantial-looking farm-house, which, although situated not very far from the high-road, was, nevertheless, concealed from it by some rising ground.

"That is your home, I suppose?"

"It is. We shall soon be there now. Curses on the brute! I'll have it shot, I will."

The approach of Dick was noticed by the inmates of the farm-house, who came out with their faces expressive of the greatest curiosity and alarm.

An explanation was soon given, and a surgeon thereupon immediately sent for, though the farmer resolutely protested against it.

He maintained stoutly that he should come round in a minute or two; but he kept getting paler, and before he had fairly crossed the threshold he almost swooned.

But he was most particular in giving instructions that Dick should be treated with the utmost hospitality, and not allowed to want for anything.

The highwayman could not help congratulating himself upon having got into such comfortable quarters, although it had been at the expense of a serious injury to the farmer.

Dick would not suffer any attentions to be shown to himself until the farmer had been thoroughly attended to, and while this was done he occupied himself in looking after his mare.

When he returned to the house, however, he found a substantial and tempting repast awaiting him, to which he did ample justice.

After that he retired to a bed-chamber, having first ascertained that the worthy farmer appeared to be considerably better.

As for Dick, he was terribly fatigued; and now that there was a prospect of rest, he seemed to become doubly sensible of it.

Fastening his door, he flung himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and no sooner had he assumed a recumbent position than he fell fast asleep.

His slumber was so profound that no ordinary noise would have been capable of arousing him from it.

This was not surprising, for he had by no means recovered from the effects of his illness, and a long time had elapsed since he had taken any proper rest.

He continued to sleep undisturbedly until just when evening was beginning to close in.

Then he awoke and made his way downstairs.

He was glad indeed to find the farmer sitting by the fireside; and by his manner it could be told that he was much better.

That good cheer and hospitality for which England is celebrated was shown to Dick, who was strongly urged to prolong his stay.

But this he declared impossible, owing to the urgency of his business.

Just as he was about to quit the house he perceived a small party of officers approaching.

Doubtless this was a portion of a larger troop which had been sent to the farm-house upon the chance of obtaining some information.

Dick drew back at once.

"Show me a back way to the stables," he said, addressing one of the farmer's sons; and then, very much to the surprise of all present, he added:

"Some men are coming across your fields who seek my life. If you wish to increase my obligations to you, you can do so by telling them that you have not seen anyone answering to my description."

These words caused so much surprise, that Dick, despite his danger, could not help feeling a little amazed.

However, before the farmer and his family could recover themselves, he followed the young man to whom he had first spoken, and who was waiting impatiently for him.

Just as the back door was closed, Dick heard a loud knocking at the front.

As the stables were situated in the rear of the farm-house, it was easy enough to gain access to them unseen.

As if to favour Dick's flight, too, a thick white mist had arisen from the meadows, which had the effect of making everything look indistinct.

The quickness with which Dick saddled and bridled Black Bess elicited the admiration of the farmer's son, who had never before been witness of such expedition.

In another instant Dick was in the saddle and making his way across the meadows, the vapour upon which quickly hid him from sight, while the soft turf made the strokes of his mare's hoofs almost inaudible.

Black Bess seemed as full of fresh vigour as her master, evincing not the least signs of having journeyed so far already.

"Luck is on my side," Dick ejaculated, when he at length emerged upon the high-road at a point nearly a dozen miles distant from the farm-house. "I have missed the grabs nicely, and now then for a speedy journey to London."

Before starting, however, he listened with the utmost intenuess; and as the night was a calm one, he was convinced that his foes were nowhere very near to him.

This point ascertained, he did not hesitate to give Black Bess the rein.

Once more, then, did this matchless steed stretch along the high-road as though animated by the same impatience as her rider.

Fain would we continue to describe her gallant progress, but it was not diversified with any incident of sufficient importance to warrant us in doing so, and moreover, many important stirring incidents are waiting for recital.

It must suffice to say, then, that Dick performed the remainder of his journey safely and with little trouble, for the officers did not appear to be so vigilantly on the look-out as he got nearer to London.

Both Bess and himself were tired, but he continued to push on, for his anxiety to reach his destination grew greater as he got nearer and nearer to it.

It thus happened that he gained no intelligence whatever concerning the fate of his two comrades.

He entered London, too, by an easterly direction, and made his way, by various unfrequented roads with which he was familiar, to that narrow passage which we have so often made mention of, and with which Old Matthew had communicated by means of a private door.

There was a time when the narrow passage was constantly and closely watched by the police; but Dick on the present occasion did not hesitate to enter it, for he judged that there could not possibly be the least suspicion existing that he was in London at all.

When he paused near the old familiar doorway, many and strange were the thoughts which passed through his mind.

A long time had elapsed since his last visit, and he had no certain knowledge that Old Matthew would be there, for he could not tell whether he had escaped the consequences attaching to his communication with Tom Davis, about whose fate Dick was most anxious.

Whether Matthew was still at his old quarters or not was a point which he felt would be quickly ascertained, for having found the concealed handle of the bell, he pressed upon it.

Hardly a moment elapsed before what seemed to be a portion of the solid wall receded, and Old Matthew stood before him.

At the very first glance Dick saw that Old Matthew's countenance had upon it an expression such as he had never seen it wear before.

But ere he uttered a word or allowed the landlord time to recover from his amazement, he entered, leading Black Bess by the bridle.

His next action was to cross the secret door behind him.

Then, and not till then, did he venture to speak.

"Why, Matthew," he exclaimed, forcing a gaiety which he was far indeed from feeling, "is this the best face you can show to me after so long an absence?"

Then perceiving that the horror-struck expression upon his friend's countenance intensified, Turpin's assumed gaiety vanished instantly, and intense anxiety took its place.

Old Matthew's silence and strange manner struck a chill to his heart.

He felt sure that some dire calamity had happened, and therefore prepared himself to hear some terrible announcement.

But still he was far from imagining anything half so awful as what had happened.

Old Matthew too, who could scarcely believe that Dick Turpin was ignorant of the disasters of that day, was in the highest degree amazed at the strangeness of the highwayman's behaviour.

Thus they stood for some moments regarding each other in silence.

Old Matthew, after many efforts, succeeded in finding his voice.

"Is it—can it be possible that—that——"

"What?" cried Dick, his impatience and dread now amounting to absolute agony. "Speak—speak out at once! You have something terrible to tell! Out with it, man! I am prepared, and can bear anything but suspense!"

"But surely you must have heard——"

"I have heard nothing!" interrupted Dick, hastily.

Matthew groaned deeply, and wrung his hands.

"Then from the bottom of my heart," he said, "do I wish it had fallen to the lot of some one else to have to tell you. Stand firm, Dick, the shock will be dreadful, for I can tell that though you think yourself prepared, you have no conception of what has happened. Tell me, will you endeavour to stand firm?"

"I will—I will!"

"Then," said Matthew, banging down his head and speaking in a hollow, stifled voice, "Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval are—are—Heaven help me!—dead—both dead—quite dead!"

CHAPTER MLXXXVII.

RELATES THE EVENTS WHICH FOLLOWED THE ARRIVAL OF THE HIGHWAYMEN AT THE WHITE HORSE INN.

HAD Old Matthew's words possessed some instantaneous petrificative effects they could not have made Dick stand more stone-like than he did.

Not a muscle moved, but he stood with dilated eyes gazing upon the landlord.

This first shock being over, a feeling of absolute incredulity succeeded.

Surely his ears had played him false, or else what he had believed to be recent, real events were no more than the vagaries of a distempered dream.

Claude and Jack dead!

The fact seemed too monstrous to be true.

He would almost as soon have believed that he was himself in a state of non-existence.

Yet some kind of horrible consciousness that the appalling intelligence he had just received was indeed only too true chained his tongue.

Pain would he have questioned his old friend, but for a long time his voice resolutely refused to perform its office.

But his glance was so terribly expressive, and had Matthew but once looked up, he would have been able to understand it as easily as spoken words.

The landlord, however, was too much overcome to look up, or, indeed, to make a movement.

But at last Dick managed to articulate.

"Again—again, Matthew—tell me that again! Unless

you do, I must believe that my ears played me false! Again—again, I say!"

"It's all true, Dick—there is not room for even the shadow of a doubt."

"Both dead?"

"Yes, and buried, too, by this time."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Dick, with a deep groan.

"I thought you must have known something of it."

"No, no—I have only just arrived, after having sustained the most terrible of all losses."

"Losses?" echoed Matthew; and as he pronounced the word he glanced towards Black Bess.

Dick understood him.

"No, no," he said—"I do not refer to her. It—it is Maud I mean."

"Maud?"

"Yes."

"What has happened to her?"

"She is dead," he replied, with a burst of emotion which he tried in vain to control.

"Calamity on calamity!" muttered Matthew. "And where is Tom King, I wonder, all this time?"

"What is that you say about my old comrade?" asked Dick, removing his hands from his face, for he had caught the sound of his name.

"I was wondering where he could be."

"Do you not know?"

"No. Do you?"

"I have not heard of him since our parting at Stonehenge."

"A dreadful business that," said Matthew, shaking his head. "I shall always blame myself for having had some share in that catastrophe."

"But Tom is not dead, is he?"

"Not to my knowledge. He has not been heard of since the time you mention."

"Then I fear the worst, for I know he was badly hit."

Matthew made no response.

It seemed as though he had his own forebodings, but did not like to give them utterance.

As though anxious to divert the subject, he cried:

"Come, Dick, we will not remain here. Take hold of Bess by the bridle. We will lead her to her old quarters."

Dick prepared to comply without uttering a word.

"He seems heedless whether there is danger or not," Matthew said to himself, as he opened the door communicating with the stable.

Then, in a louder voice, he added:

"I don't feel much afraid that the officers will trouble us to-night, Dick, they are too full of the business they have done. Rely upon it, a day or two's quiet will follow."

But Dick's thoughts seemed too much absorbed for him to give such matters as these any consideration.

Black Bess, in fact, came in for a greater share of neglect than he had ever before shown her.

He was like one who had been stunned by a heavy blow and had only partially recovered from the effects of it.

But the mare having been properly attended to, Matthew took hold of the highwayman's arm and led him towards that door we have so often described, which formed a means of communication between the yard and the private parlour behind the bar.

Dick sank down helpless, and went into the first chair he came to, and then, in a hollow, murmuring voice, he said:

"Now, Matthew, if you feel sure from interruption, sit down and tell me all this horrible business from first to last. I know nothing of the movements of my comrades after we separated at Stonehenge."

Dick Turpin having thus spoken, bent forward in his seat, and placing his elbows upon his knees, covered his face with his hands and prepared to listen.

Before, however, the landlord could collect himself for the commencement of his sad recital, some one tapped lightly with their fingers against the door leading into the bar, which was no longer half-glass as formerly, but composed entirely of wood.

It hardly seemed possible that Dick Turpin had not heard this sound; but if he had he took no notice of it, though by the look of Old Matthew it would seem as though there was danger to be apprehended.

"Keep quiet," he said; "I will just run out and see what is the matter. You shall have timely warning if there should be any danger."

But to all appearances his words fell upon unheeding ears, for Turpin neither moved nor spoke.

Matthew hastily opened the door and passed through, closing it carefully and quickly after him.

But another surprise awaited him.

Standing at the bar window was Tom King.

It was not possible to be in any doubt as regarded his identity, but he looked so pale, so thin, so worn, and haggard, that Matthew's first impression was that the highwayman's spectre stood before him, and not himself.

Tom observed his astonishment, and smiled faintly.

"Do you take me for a ghost, Matthew? You look as scared as though you do. Don't be alarmed—I am here in the flesh, though terribly worn out. I want the captain."

By the time Tom King had finished speaking these words Old Matthew had recovered himself.

Quick as thought, he rushed across the bar and, opening the door, bade Tom enter.

Then, without giving him time to say a word, he dragged him to the inner door, opened it, and pushed him over the threshold.

The noise thus made caused Dick to look up.

He recognised his old comrade at a glance.

He sprang up with an ejaculation of joy and thankfulness upon his lips, and the next instant he had clasped Tom's hands in both his own.

Old Matthew prudently bolted the door to secure them from interruption, whilst at the same time he implored them to make as little noise as possible.

The meeting was most unexpected on both sides.

The satisfaction both experienced at this reunion for the first few moments rose superior to everything else.

But Tom's first inquiries brought Dick to a remembrance of the calamities which for the moment it may be said he had forgotten.

The questions served to show that he was quite ignorant of the fate which had fallen upon his companions.

Again it became necessary for Matthew to break the awful intelligence, for Dick was wholly incapable of the task.

As the reader will readily suppose, Tom King was not less affected by this appalling news than Dick himself.

Like him, he was at first absolutely incredulous.

After their long association, it seemed impossible that there should come such a sudden and violent cessation.

Like Dick, also, he did not yet realise that he had indeed looked upon the countenances of his faithful allies for the last time.

"I was just about to tell the captain all the particulars of what had happened when I heard that tap at the door."

"Do you think we shall be interrupted?"

"No, not to-night. The officers are all too busy congratulating themselves upon what has happened."

Tom shuddered.

"I forget to say," he added, after a brief pause, "I left my horse outside."

"What! in the street?"

"Yes."

"That was highly incautious. Who is in charge of it?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"No; the poor animal has come too many miles for me to be at all afraid that she will run away."

"She must be seen to," said Matthew. "If the officers should see her they will, of course, suspect—"

He did not stop to finish the sentence, but abruptly left the room.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were now alone.

"This is a dreadful business, Dick," said the latter. "How did it all happen?"

"Do not ask me. I have no idea of the particulars. Matthew was about to tell them to me when you came."

"True—I remember."

"But there is another calamity still."

"Another?"

"Yes, one that you have not heard of."

"Is Maud concerned in it?"

"Yes," said Turpin, his voice almost choked.

"I feared so."

"For what reason?"

"Because I fancied that the wound she had received was mortal."

"It proved so."

"Then you have my sincere pity, Dick."

"I knew it. But I feel as though life had no longer a charm for me."

"And so do I."

"But you have experienced no loss."

"True; but yet I have a kind of dread upon my mind which I cannot get the mastery of."

"A dread?"

"Yes. Do you remember the prophecy?"

"Prophecy—prophecy?"

"I can tell you do not. I mean about me being destined to die at your hands."

"Pooh, pooh, Tom! Cast aside such foolish thoughts. I would sooner believe that Old Matthew is destined to betray us to the police."

"Hark! he comes."

At this moment the landlord entered.

He looked rather more cheerful than he had done hitherto.

"The coast is clearer than I had hoped to find it!" he exclaimed. "The officers must be holding high revel somewhere; there has not been one seen outside all the day."

"They must imagine we are away from London," said Tom.

"Depend upon it, they have no suspicion of your being here; and such being the case, I have no doubt you will be able to remain unsuspected some time—that is, if you wish to do so."

"We hardly know what we wish for at present."

"No—no, certainly not. However, your horses are both in perfect safety, and yet where you can have them again almost in a moment if you wish."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Turpin, displaying a little impatience. "But, come, sit down and satisfy our curiosity."

"I will."

Matthew seated himself between the highwaymen, who prepared themselves to listen with the closest attention to every word which might fall from his lips.

As the reader is already acquainted with all the particulars connected with Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, it would be nothing more than waste of time to set down what Matthew said.

And the reader will easily understand what sort of effect was produced upon the two highwaymen by what they heard.

When they were informed of the manner in which Claude had been struck down their indignation knew no bounds.

At first they refused belief altogether, but Matthew assured them that what he said was quite correct.

"I could do nothing in the matter," the landlord added, in conclusion. "Every movement I made was watched with the utmost closeness. Strive as I would, I could not escape their scrutiny. They seemed as though quite certain that if any attempt at rescue would be made it would be organised here. I was in momentary expectation of seeing you, yet I dreaded to do so, for I thought if you approached this quarter your fate, too, would be sealed."

The discussion upon what had happened was prolonged to a very late hour; or, rather, an early one, for day was close at hand when the conference broke up.

Matthew then proposed that they should retire to rest.

"I have a couple of good rooms upstairs," he said, "which are quite at your service, and I should recommend that you remained in them. I don't believe anyone has seen you enter the house; and if you do not come downstairs, and I only allow those who can be trusted to go up, I don't see why you should not remain undetected for a long time."

"There seems every probability of it, Matthew," said Dick. "And some little time will be necessary for us to talk matters over and decide upon what is to be done."

"Certainly!"

"Moreover, we are both weak and ill—our nerves are shattered; but if we have a little quiet we shall soon get something like ourselves again, I hope."

"So do I. Come, follow me!"

The landlord led the highwaymen upstairs.

The rooms of which he spoke were at the top of the house, and the windows were so placed that it was impossible for any of the people in the neighbouring houses to look through them.

Thus there did indeed seem some chance that the highwaymen would have a brief period of rest and quiet after the terrible events which had recently occurred, for on Old Matthew's fidelity they could thoroughly rely.

CHAPTER MLXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN LEARNS THAT THE REWARD OFFERED FOR HIS APPREHENSION HAS BEEN DOUBLED.

WHEN Dick Turpin said that both himself and his companion were weak and ill he spoke truly, for both of them were reduced to what might almost be termed the last stage of physical and mental prostration.

With Tom King this was particularly the case.

The reader knows how severely he was wounded, and, for recovery, rest of body and peace of mind were strongly needed.

So far, however, from being able to avail himself of these means of restoration, he had been compelled to go through exertion of the most violent kind, and then, at last, he had received two terrible mental shocks.

Dick Turpin could scarcely be called any better.

Conversation with his old comrade, with whom he had been so long separated, had no charm, and as soon as ever Old Matthew had left, Dick threw himself upon one of the beds, and either fell fast asleep or else gave himself up to deep reflection.

Tom saw he was in no humour to be spoken to, and therefore followed his example.

Both felt themselves for a time out of danger, for Old Matthew would not fail to give them timely notice if any officers came near.

Thus things remained until late in the day; even then they might not have aroused themselves if Matthew had not entered.

He had not overlooked the necessities of his guests, and carried before him on a tray a substantial and tempting repast, which he had prepared with his own hands.

His entrance aroused the two highwaymen, who came eagerly into the outer room, inquiring whether all was well.

"Yes—yes," said Old Matthew, "everything is perfectly quiet, so sit down and enjoy this meal in peace; I am sure you must want something."

"You are a real friend, Matthew."

"I am glad you think so."

"And have the officers resumed their watch?"

"What, upon these premises?"

"Yes."

"At present I think I may venture to say they have not."

"All has been quiet, then?"

"Perfectly so."

"That is encouraging."

"Very. I hope you will be able to remain in peace until you become once more like yourselves."

"Ah! Matthew," said Dick, with a heavy sob, "after what has happened it is in vain for you to expect that we shall be anything like what we have once been."

Tom King assented with a gloomy shake of the head.

"Well, well, we shall see," answered Matthew. "Sit down to the table, and do not forget that there is an old proverb which says Time works wonders."

"It may be true," said Dick, with a slight shudder, "but I shall never, never forget the past."

The highwaymen had not much appetite for the meal which had been laid before them, and it was more a disinclination to offend their old friend, the landlord, than aught else which induced them to touch it.

When the repast was over, Matthew closed the shutters and lighted a couple of candles, which he placed on the table near the fire.

Then he drew from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper, which he smoothed out with great care.

"What is that?" asked Dick.

"The *Gazette*—the newspaper which contains all the latest intelligence."

"And is there anything in it about us?"

"There is about you, Dick. The reward for your apprehension has been doubled, so that now it represents a tolerable amount."

"Lend it me," said Tom King—"I will look over it."

"Do; it will serve to pass the time away. I will go down again, for any long absence on my part might be noticed, and so give rise to suspicion."

"Try to keep our presence here a secret."

"You may depend upon it."

"It will not be very easy," remarked Tom King to his companion just as the landlord closed the door of the room behind him.

"What makes you say that?"

"Simply what I have been reading."

"Let me hear it," said Dick, with languid interest.

"Well, what Matthew says about doubling the reward is perfectly correct, so that that will stimulate our foes not a little. I was not referring to that, however."

"What then?"

"You will be able to judge best by hearing me read it just listen."

Tom King then read aloud the following paragraph:—

"Our readers will see in another column that the reward offered for the apprehension of that noted offender, Dick Turpin, has been doubled. We gladly give publicity to the fact, because we believe, when widely known, it will be the means of bringing him to justice. We have good authority, moreover, for stating that there is unusually strong probability of his speedy capture. He has been seen very recently on the Western Road, apparently having London for his destination. The officers are following up his track with a closeness and perseverance which promise eventual success. When the notorious highwayman has been brought to justice it is hoped that passengers will once more be able to make their way safely along the high-roads which have for so long been disgracefully dangerous to all travellers."

"There, Dick," cried Tom King, when he had finished reading, "what do you think of that?"

"Very little. They will have to be much sharper than they have ever shown themselves, or Old Matthew very careless, for them to be able to hunt us down here."

Tom did not answer.

In fact, he had gone on reading, and apparently what he read was of so interesting a character as to render him oblivious of all else.

Dick at once relaxed into a reverie.

His eyes were fixed upon the fire, but instead of seeing it he perceived only the quaint little churchyard where Maud lay.

An exclamation from Tom King aroused him.

"Here is something still more startling," he said, in an agitated voice.

"About us?"

"About one of us," answered Tom, vainly attempting to conceal his perturbation of spirits.

"Which one?"

"Myself."

"Read, then," said Dick, rousing himself more thoroughly than he had done.

Tom King, in a low and tremulous tone, then read as follows:—

"IMPORTANT.—If the son of the late Marquis of Belgarde (the son by the second marriage, which was afterwards decreed invalid), and who mysteriously disappeared after the trial, will apply to Messrs. Flint and Steele, Solicitors, York, he will hear something greatly to his advantage."

"Well," said Dick Turpin, with an air of surprise and disappointment, "is that all. In what way can that advertisement concern either of us?"

"Is it possible that you forget—"

"Forget what?"

"I see you have forgotten," remarked Tom King, with increasing melancholy. "But do you not remember that a long time ago I related to you the history of my early life?"

"Yes, I remember it perfectly."

"Well, then—"

"Belgarde—Belgarde: the name is familiar."

"After what has happened I am not surprised that you should forget. Besides, it is a long time ago since I made the narration."

"My memory fails me."

"No wonder. Well, I will tell you again. My father was the Marquis of Belgarde. He died before I was two years old, and I was brought up on one of the estates, where I remained until nearly of age—of course, anticipating that I should be the marquis. Instead of that," he added, in a changed voice, and with a bitter laugh, "I have become a highwayman."

"I remember now," said Dick; "there was a former marriage—on your father's part—a discarded wife—whose son was by law declared the true heir to the title and estates."

"Just so. It is a tale of sin and wrong. As you know, when I found out what the verdict was, I fled, for my pride would not allow me to remain there a finger-pointing object for everyone."

"Then it is you who are advertised for?"

"Undoubtedly."

"What can it be that is to your advantage?"

"There I am as much in the dark as you are. But I cannot describe the effect which those few lines have had upon me, and how vividly they have brought back to my recollection my youthful days."

Just as he uttered these words, Old Matthew appeared.

"Is all well?" Dick asked, for he guessed this visit had some cause.

"Yes, all is well," was the reassuring answer. "I merely came up for a moment to see whether you were in want of anything."

"Do you often read the newspaper, Matthew?" asked Tom King.

"Yes, pretty regularly," he answered, in some surprise.

"Why do you ask?"

"Why, because I thought you might perhaps have seen some mention made of—of—the Marquis of Belgarde?"

"Well, yes, I have," he replied, curiously. "But why do you inquire?"

"Perhaps merely from curiosity," said Tom King, displaying great impatience. "At any rate, I shall feel myself indebted if you will tell me all you know."

"I will do so willingly; but you will find it very little. I suppose you know that the marquis has just died?"

"Just died?" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes—and at the time of his death I saw a few particulars in the paper concerning him."

"Was it respecting the manner in which he succeeded to the title?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"It seems his mother lived the greater part of her life in great poverty in London, and here the marquis was brought up like any ordinary vagabond."

"I know that," said Tom, hastily. "The woman was really married, though the marquis, his father, thought the ceremony a sham one. This was proved by his marrying again."

"Yes," chimed in Matthew, "and he had a son by this second union, who was brought up as the heir; but when the trial was decided against him he disappeared."

Tom nodded.

"It seems that the son by the first wife, and who lived but a very short time to enjoy his wealth and title, always regretted that he had deprived another of so much, so that, you see, despite his bringing up, he was not quite dead to every good feeling."

Tom's lips curled with a bitter, incredulous smile.

"He was in earnest," continued Old Matthew, for, having no near relative of his own, he has bequeathed by will the whole of his possessions to this second son, who has been searched for with the utmost diligence."

"He has not been found?" said Tom.

"No—you may see the advertisement in that very paper."

"I have seen it."

"Well, now that I have told you all I know, at least

satisfy me why you feel so uncommon an amount of interest in the matter?"

"I—"

But Tom did not finish, for at that moment the faint tinkling of a bell was heard.

"I am wanted," interrupted Matthew, hurrying to the door.

"Is it danger?" asked both highwaymen, springing to their feet.

"No, no—don't be alarmed. Sit down again, and remain easy and quiet. You shall have timely warning if you are threatened with any peril."

So saying, Matthew closed the door and hastily descended the stairs.

CHAPTER MLXXXIX.

OLD MATTHEW GIVES THE HIGHWAYMEN THE BENEFIT OF HIS ADVICE.

"He will not deceive or mislead us," said Dick, sinking down into his chair again. "I am amazed," he continued, "at what I have just heard."

"Are you?" asked Tom, with another bitter laugh.

"Yes, because you are the person advertised for, and of course the heir to a large fortune."

"And what good would it do me?" inquired Tom, moodily. "I dare not step forward to claim it; if I did, I should have to answer for my life."

"I suppose that is the case. Hark! here comes Old Matthew."

The landlord now returned.

"It is all right," he said; "I was misled by hearing another bell. All is well; and I thought such being the case, the best thing I could do was to make haste back and say so."

"Many thanks."

Old Matthew evidently meant to stay, for he sat down before the fire, and said:

"Now, Tom King, it is not often I speak in such a way, but let me tell you that I do not intend to stir from here until you have told me all about this Belgarde affair. You had some particular reason for asking, and I think I am justified in demanding to know."

There could scarcely have been any request to which Tom would have acceded so unwillingly as this.

But he felt that he could not with very good grace refuse anything to one who had done them such service as Matthew had.

This consideration decided him, and, though very reluctantly, he related those particulars of his early life with which the reader is familiar.

Matthew listened in unqualified amazement—indeed, almost in disbelief.

But he soon found that Tom was thoroughly in earnest.

"This is enough to stun anyone!" he exclaimed, as soon as Tom had brought his narrative to a conclusion. "But I must think upon it—I must really think upon it, for I am already impressed with the notion that the occurrence can, and ought to be, turned to the advantage of you both."

Tom shook his head.

Old Matthew, however, did not allow this gesture to discourage him, but sat staring into the fire with the air and manner of one who is thinking deeply.

He remained thus for some time, but at length he broke out, emphatically:

"You must both of you—or, at least, you, Tom—go to York."

"To York! What for?"

"To see these lawyers."

"And be recognised and made prisoner!"

"No, no—you must manage better than that."

"But how is it possible for me to do so?"

"That we must consider. First of all you must not overlook the circumstance that in this land of freedom money is all-powerful, and the possessor of enough of it can do anything he pleases."

"Well, granting that, what of it?"

"Why, the heir to the estates of the late Marquis of Belgarde would be looked upon as a very different person from Tom King, the highwayman."

"Come, Matthew," said Tarpin, joining in the conversation, "it is an odd thing to me if you cannot see some means of turning this coincidence in our favour."

The landlord's eyes glittered.

"Well," he said, with an affectation of modesty, "I certainly had an idea in my mind."

"Then out with it! Let us hear what it is. I will be bound it is something good!"

"That depends upon how Tom takes it," said Matthew, with a side glance at Dick's companion.

"I cannot tell till I hear what you have to say," said Tom King.

"In the first place, then," Matthew began, "I suppose you have the means of proving your identity?"

"Oh yes!"

"About you?"

"No—but I could easily procure the necessary evidence."

"Very good—that comes to just the same thing."

"What do you propose?"

"Why, I think you should go to York."

"To York?"

"Yes—that is a part of the country you have not visited, I think?"

"We have not."

"Then you might count upon being unknown if you can only get away from here unseen, and I think I can undertake to manage that part of the business for you."

"And what are we to do at York?"

"Why, you must put yourselves into communication with these lawyers."

Tom shook his head.

"Stay—hear me out!" cried Matthew, rapidly. "You must manage all with caution. Let them know who you are, and, take my word for it, they will interest themselves and obtain a pardon for you; and, remember, you will be able to pay them well out of the property you are coming into."

"A pardon!" repeated Tom, with the air of one who is thinking deeply.

"Yes—a pardon."

Tom shook his head.

"I fear I have done too much for a pardon to be granted to me."

"Tut, tut! Don't I tell you that money will do everything in England. If you were ten times as black as you are it would wash you as white as snow!"

"Do you in good earnest think there is a possibility of such a thing?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"If I did not," asked Matthew, "do you think I should counsel you to do it?"

"Well, of course not."

"But," said Tom, "enter a little more into explanation."

"I should be very glad to do so if you would only allow me the opportunity."

"We will listen, then."

"Very good; and you may take my word that I believe things could be managed as I say. If influence powerful enough was only brought to bear, your pardon could be obtained."

Although Tom tried to conceal his sentiments, yet it was plain enough to be seen by his manner that this prospect was far from displeasing to him.

"To tell you the truth," he exclaimed, for he guessed that his friends had read his thoughts, "I am tired now of the life I have been leading after what has happened to Claude and Jack—I feel that I can never take the least pleasure in it again."

"I don't wonder at it."

"Moreover," said Tom, displaying more excitement and interest than he had done hitherto, "if I succeed in getting my own pardon, I shall then have so much influence perhaps as will enable me to get a pardon for the captain too."

Dick put up his hand.

"You will not have to take that trouble, Tom."

"Why not?"

"Because I have made up my mind to take the very first opportunity I can find to leave England."

"Leave England?" ejaculated Old Matthew, pushing his chair back several inches in his intense astonishment.

"Yes; this land has no longer the slightest charms for me—not the slightest. I—I—long to be on the other side of the channel—near to the little hamlet or village I

spoke of. There, and there alone, could I wish to end my days and if I can succeed in reaching that spot I shall be beyond the reach of pardon."

"Very true," said Tom.

"But you won't do it," cried Matthew, vehemently—"I am sure you won't do it."

"If I live I shall," answered Turpin, in those quiet, earnest tones which are so much more expressive of stern determination than loud and boastful protestations.

"Well, we shall have to see about that," replied Matthew, resolved that if he could do nothing else he would at any rate change the subject. "Let us first talk about this journey to York. Are you inclined to undertake it?"

"What do you say, captain?" asked Tom King.

"I am quite willing. All ways are the same to me now. Except," he added, "that it may be I shall be able to get a boat from the vicinity of York much easier than I could from any other part of the country, for there I should rely upon being thoroughly unknown."

"And no doubt justly so," said Matthew. "May we look upon this matter, then, as being quite settled?"

"Yes," said Tom, with a sigh, "I suppose we may."

"Then why that sigh?"

"I know not. I was only thinking of—"

"Thinking of what?"

"Some foolish remarks," was the reply. "I key are not worth consideration."

But Old Matthew evidently thought himself entitled to know everything connected with the highwaymen, and became so pressing that, in order to get rid of his importunities more than for any other reason, Tom related to him the particulars of the strange prophecy.

Matthew greeted the recital with a laugh.

"I only hope we may all live to see that day. If we do we shall have nothing to complain of on the score of old age. Nothing could be more unlikely to come to pass than that."

It was clear, however, that a certain impression had been made by it on the mind of Tom King—perhaps more than there would have been had he just then been in his usual state of health.

Dick, too, had heard the story so often repeated that a vague feeling that there might be something in it came over him.

The subject was immediately changed by Matthew, who was full of the project he had started for a journey to York.

"If you would take my advice," he said, "you will consent to remain here as long as possible; or, at any rate, until you are sufficiently recovered to start upon your journey."

"The counsel is too agreeable to be disregarded," said Turpin. "I confess I should like to feel that I had recovered something like a proper share of my strength before I attempted any fresh undertaking."

Thus was the matter decided.

A day passed over in perfect tranquillity; but Dick, in watching his companion, saw that hour by hour he grew more and more uneasy, nor was he at any loss about the cause.

The prospect Matthew had held out to him—not only of obtaining a pardon for all his past offences, but also of recovering possession of what had once been his—continued to make a deeper and deeper impression upon him.

Who could wonder that such a future should display itself to him in the most tempting of colours?

The more he reflected the more glowing did his anticipations become, and that which at first he was inclined to pass over without notice came to be the one great object of his life.

His impatience at length became too great to be altogether concealed.

He did not say so, but yet he hinted in many ways that he was tired of his stay, and full of anxiety to know whether Matthew's ideas had any substantiality.

As for Dick, the monotony of confinement in those rooms at the top of Old Matthew's house quickly became excessively irksome to him.

It was, then, on the third night after their arrival that they announced to Old Matthew that they were in readiness to go.

"I had certainly not expected you would take so nasty



[DICK TURPIN TREATS BLACK BESS TO A BEEFSTEAK.]

a departure; otherwise I would not have mentioned the matter just at present. Let me persuade you to stay a little longer yet—you are scarcely in condition to cope with any great danger, should any arise."

"I shall get no better here," said Tom King, impatiently. "What other reason is there why we should not go at once?"

"None that I know of."

"Then we will go."

"But at least not to-night—it is already too late to think about it, because no preparations whatever have been made."

"Well, let it be to-morrow night, then," said Dick Turpin.

"As you please. I will see that by dusk everything is in perfect readiness."

No. 237.—BLACK BESS.

This point being decided upon, some hours were spent in anxious deliberation.

Tom King and Turpin, between them, were possessed of a considerable amount, and this they were both anxious to induce Matthew to accept. But he firmly refused it.

"No—no," he said; "you cannot tell what want you may have for it. Keep it—keep it; I will settle for all the past, Tom, as soon as you are pardoned and in undisturbed possession of your wealth."

But Dick insisted that half of the larger sum should be given to Matthew there and then.

He would take no refusal.

The remaining half he roughly, but as near as could be equally, divided between his comrade and himself.

This being done, they separated and awaited with the utmost impatience the coming of the succeeding night

which they hoped would prove to be the herald of better times for both.

Hopes how vain!—how impossible of realisation!

CHAPTER MXO.

THE PROPHECY FULFILLED—DICK TURPIN SHOTS TOM KING IN DRURY LANE.

It has been said truly that we believe readily that which we wish to be true and likely to come to pass.

But for this it is questionable whether Tom King would have suffered himself to be so led away by the possibilities which Old Matthew had suggested.

To one capable of judging calmly and justly, and one acquainted with all the circumstances, nothing would have appeared more unlikely than that by any means or influence, however powerful, Tom King could hope for legal pardon for his many and great offences.

But for his own part he did think it probable, and so did Turpin, whose thoughts, however, it must be confessed, were more bent upon making his way as speedily as possible to the little French village, where Maud had found a last resting-place.

At any rate, he was glad enough to quit the safe shelter which Old Matthew's roof had afforded him.

During the long period of the sojourn of the highwaymen, however, nothing particular had been seen of the police.

They had been unusually quiet and undemonstrative.

This could only be accounted for by the supposition that they were away on the wrong scent, or else that they were concerting such measures as would tend to the annihilation of the two knights of the road.

Both suppositions were in a measure right, as will be shortly seen.

For the present, however, we must confine ourselves to a description of the proceedings of Dick Turpin and Tom King.

Faithful to his promise, Old Matthew had made every preparation, and having watched his opportunity, he succeeded in getting both our friends into the little private parlour.

"Fortune favours you," he said, briskly, rubbing his hands together—"you ought to account yourselves specially lucky. I believe I may say, with truth, there are no officers about."

"Then," said Tom King, "if that is the case, the sooner we are off the better."

"Certainly; and yet there is no need to be precipitate. Believe me, I am not very anxious to get rid of you."

"Where are the horses?" asked Dick.

"In the stable."

"Are they all right?"

"Right as trivets, Bess especially. I think I never saw her in such good trim and spirits. She seems fit for anything."

At these words Dick experienced a faint revisitation of the old joy which the remembrance of his gallant mare occasioned him.

"I long to see the noble creature once more!" he exclaimed, with fervour. "I long to sit again upon her back! When I do—then, and not till then, shall I feel something like myself again."

But though Turpin began to speak enthusiastically he finished with a heavy sigh, which told all too plainly how great was the sorrow that was weighing at his heart.

"Still a cup too low, captain?" said Old Matthew. "But I will try to get you the better of that."

Dick shook his head.

"You may never expect to see me anything like what I once was."

"Pho—pho! you know nothing about it," replied the landlord, who was busily at work with a corkscrew. "Look here," he added, holding a bottle towards the highwaymen, "try a drop of this: it is wine, mind you—every drop of it is worth a hog'shead of the stuff that is ordinarily sold under that name. Drink this, and then all the vapours now hanging about your heart and brain will vanish! Drink it, I say, and then depart."

While speaking, Old Matthew poured out three large glasses of the wine.

The invitation was one which Dick and Tom King were not very likely to refuse.

"A toast!" said Matthew, as he raised his glass. "Here is hoping I shall not see you again until you are in possession of your own, and when you have obtained not only your own pardon but the captain's too!"

"I hope so too!" said Tom, in response. "But now, Matthew, you will excuse my impatience. Let us say no more—let us not lose a moment more of valuable time. Get our horses ready, and we will start at once."

"As you will," answered the landlord, putting down his empty glass. "I am sorry to part with you; but yet I cannot ask you to remain, for I feel assured there can never be a more favourable opportunity for getting off unseen."

"Where are the horses?"

"In the stable at present."

"Right—you told me so. But how are we to mount?"

"I will tell you. I have thought the matter over, and my belief is that the best way will be to have them brought round to the front."

"What, into Drury Lane?"

"Yes—and the moment they arrive you must sally out, mount with all speed, and ride off."

"But why this course?"

"Because it seems to me to be the one that will give you the best chance against your enemies."

"How so?"

"If anyone is on the watch—and there might be a spy at hand—you will be off and away before he has time to raise an alarm."

"Very true, Matthew. It shall be as you have planned it; only let us go now at once."

"Your weapons are all in perfect readiness for instant use?"

"Trust us for that."

"Then in two minutes the horses shall be in the front."

Matthew quitted the bar-parlour as he spoke.

But he did not latch the door, and Tom, prompted by restlessness and curiosity, took advantage of the circumstance to peep out into the bar beyond.

Judging by his manner, he saw something interesting, for he at once beckoned Dick to his side.

The latter then peeped through the crevice, and his regards were instantly fixed upon a man who was in the act of drinking something at the counter.

Although a great part of the countenance of this individual was concealed by a large bandage, which was placed in a diagonal direction over the left eye, yet Dick was immediately conscious that he had seen this man somewhere before.

But in what place, and when, he in vain tasked his memory to remember.

There was nothing in his manner at all provocative of suspicion. He drank from his glass calmly enough, and seemed to stare around him only with the listless gaze of one who wanted better occupation.

The highwaymen were still watching when they observed Old Matthew approaching, and then of course they withdrew.

"Is all well still?" was the first question.

"I think so."

"Who is that fellow at the bar?"

"What, you have seen him?"

"Yes—who is he?"

"I wish I knew. I am impressed with the idea that I have seen him before at some time or other, and looking very different to what he does now."

"That is just my impression," said Dick Turpin.

"I should set him down for a spy," said Tom. "That was my thought when first I caught sight of him."

"Wait a moment," said Matthew. "I shall know more about him directly, for I intend to have a good look at his features, and without his being any the wiser for it."

These words roused the attention of the two friends.

There seemed to be no end to Old Matthew's contrivances, and he made use of a fresh one on the present occasion.

Stopping nimbly on a chair, he removed a small picture which was hanging against the wall.

A small round hole then became visible, and to this he applied his eye.

This peep-hole was so skilfully placed that it enabled anyone to take a full view of the bar and the passage beyond.

Matthew remained motionless for what seemed to be an intolerable long time to those who were watching him.

At last he descended, and, in answer to the inquiring glances which were bent upon him, he said:

"I think I know him now, although he has disguised himself so well."

"Disguised himself! Who is it?"

"One who has had rather rough treatment here," answered Matthew, complacently, "though it seems he has not yet had enough."

"Who is it?"

"A spy—that's who it is!"

"A spy?" repeated both the highwaymen, at once handing their weapons.

"Yes. I scalded him once terribly with some warm water. But I only wish it had been just a trifle hotter!"

"That is the rascal, is it?"

"It is."

"Is he there still?"

"He was when I stepped down."

Dick nimbly mounted the chair, and there sure enough stood the man, apparently having not the least intention of moving—at any rate, not for some time to come.

Now that Old Matthew had declared his identity, Dick had no trouble at all in recognising him.

"What is to be done?" he said, as he descended. "It will not do for us to attempt to pass him."

"No, no—certainly not; and perhaps, after all, he is quite as well where he is as he would be if he were outside."

"What do you intend to do? If the horses are in the lane how are we to reach them?"

"They are sure to be there by now. But you seem to have forgotten my private way. Look here."

So saying, Matthew opened the secret door by which, as the reader will remember, communication could be had with the yard.

In less than a moment all three were standing in the open air.

Matthew without delay unfastened the door leading into White Horse Yard.

With his hand upon the lock, he said, in a subdued voice, for he was not without the dread that there might be listeners near:

"Farewell, and good luck to you both! I hope you will have every success. When I open the door make a rush into Drury Lane, mount your horses, and be off. You cannot possibly be too speedy in your movements."

"Good-bye, Matthew!" said Tom. "If I do succeed, rest assured that you will not be forgotten."

"I know all about that. Be off with you, and above all, be quick!"

"Open the door, then."

The command was instantly obeyed, and the highwaymen at once glided out into the darkness.

Although they moved rapidly towards the end of the passage, yet their steps were very stealthy and cautious.

At the end of it, and before venturing to dash into the road, they paused.

The first thing they caught sight of was a man holding the two horses.

It would seem that he had been keeping a sharp lookout for them, for he came hastily towards them.

All seemed silent and suggestive of safety.

"Now for it, Tom!" said Dick. "One rush, and be into the saddle as quickly as you can."

"Never fear for that."

"Now, then!"

The highwaymen made a sudden dash forward.

"Off, and away!" said the man, in a low voice. "I am greatly deceived if the grabs are not about in good force to-night! Off, and away!"

Before he had finished speaking the sharp, clear tones of a whistle broke the silence.

Had it been the summons of a magician it could not have produced a speedier effect.

As if by enchantment the a moment before quiet street became alive with police officers.

Dick found himself roughly seized; but he quickly threw off the grasp, and with that sudden bound which he had so often practised, and which had so many times stood him in such good stead, he placed himself in the saddle.

But, rapid as he had been in his movements, yet there had been time enough for two of his foes to be busy with the bridle of his mare.

Like a flash of light Dick's sword leaped from its scabbard, and, quick as the eye could wink, the two men released their hold, and drew back with cries of pain, for they had been so severely wounded about the wrists as to deprive them of all use of their hands.

Obedying the rein, Black Bess gave a sudden bound which carried herself and rider out of the immediate reach of their foes.

Fortunate indeed was it that this sudden movement was made, for quite a shower of bullets flew over the spot they had so recently occupied.

For Dick the way of escape lay open, provided he had chosen to avail himself of immediate flight.

But this was just what he was determined not to do.

He resolved to look to his old comrade, who had not been so successful as himself.

Tom King was not quite so expert at mounting rapidly as Dick was.

However, despite the attack made upon him by his foes, he succeeded in getting one of his feet in the stirrup.

But, unluckily, his horse at this moment swerved aside.

Then the chance was lost.

The officer who had been at first repulsed, sprang again upon him and grasped him tightly by the throat.

Self-defence then compelled Tom King to abandon his attempt to mount his steed while he struggled with his foe.

But he found that his antagonist, though inferior to him in point of height, possessed a remarkably muscular frame, and before many seconds had elapsed our old friend felt that for once he was opposed to one whose strength was greater than his own.

That this should be the case will seem in no measure astonishing when it is remembered that Tom was much enfeebled by his wounds, from which he was very far from having recovered.

But he felt that his life depended upon his exertions, and he struggled tremendously.

The officer's tactics were apparent enough.

His intention was to hurl Tom King to the earth and then fling himself upon him.

"Hold off!" he cried to his associates. "Keep where you are; I can manage the job single-handed easily enough. Leave me, I say, and look after the other one."

There was very near an end to his boasting at this moment, for Tom King, fully realising the desperate nature of his position, summoned up all his energies in order to free himself from the firm grip of his adversary.

The attempt almost succeeded, but not quite.

His temporary success was, in fact, merely owing to the circumstance that he found the officer slightly off his guard.

The struggle now was terrific.

It was just at this juncture that Black Bess gave that extraordinary bound which placed Dick Turpin in temporary safety, and enabled him to look round and see how things fared with his friend.

Before he had time to think what he should do—before, even, he could finish drawing a fresh pistol—which was the first thing instinct prompted him to do—the officer succeeded in flinging Tom King to the earth.

But the highwayman did not cease his struggles.

At first he was undermost, but by a dexterous movement he changed positions with his foe.

Happening then to look up, he saw Dick, some paces off, holding a pistol in his hand.

"Fire, captain," he cried—"fire! Shoot the fellow! It is my only chance, for I am almost overpowered."

Dick raised his arm and levelled his pistol.

But so rapid were the gyrations of the two combatants that it was impossible to take such an aim at the one as would secure him from wounding the other.

But Tom King was getting exhausted.

"Fire, Dick!" he exclaimed, at the top of his voice. "Why don't you fire? Do you want to see me made prisoner before your eyes?"

"I cannot aim. I am afraid of hitting you!"

"No matter!" cried Tom, impetuously. "Better that than be dragged to Tyburn! Fire—fire, I say! It is the first favour I have begged of you! Fire, I say! Now—now, or you will be too late!"

As he spoke, Tom King made the most strenuous efforts to keep his adversary in one position, while at the same time he held back as much as possible.

Dick fancied he saw his chance, and took a rapid aim.

But the officer was by no means insensible to the danger by which he was menaced.

He caught one glimpse of the glittering barrel of Dick Turpin's pistol.

The sight seemed to gift him with double strength.

A sudden wrench enabled him to shift his position, and it was at this moment that the report of a pistol was heard.

Dick's finger was on the trigger when the officer moved; but he was not in time either to alter the position of the barrel or to stop the pressure.

There was a loud, wild cry, and when the smoke cleared away from before Dick's eyes he saw Tom King lying upon the ground bathed in blood.

The frightful spectacle almost maddened him, and with an awful curse he flung the discharged weapon from him.

By a sudden but painful effort, Tom partially raised himself from the ground.

"The prophecy is fulfilled!" he cried. "Dick, I die by the hand of my best friend! Farewell! Fly—fly—fly at once! Do not linger now, for I am past all mortal aid! Keep my secret! I—I—"

A gush of blood interrupted his speech, and with a gurgling groan he sank back on to the hard roadway—dead!

CHAPTER MXOL

TOM KING, THE HIGHWAYMAN, FINDS HIS LAST RESTING-PLACE.

LIKE some statue of horror or despair, Dick sat upon his steed gazing with a stupefied air at what had just occurred.

So great was the shock that it was clear that at present he was in doubt whether what he saw was real.

But he was aroused by the vigorous efforts of the officers, who, quickly recovering from the state of astonishment into which this occurrence had thrown even them, rushed upon him, intent either upon his death or capture.

The well-known accent of Old Matthew's voice also fell upon his ear.

"Fly—fly!" he heard the landlord exclaim. "Make the best speed you can. To linger here can do no good, for Tom is now beyond all mortal power. You are not to blame. It was fate. Fly—fly!"

Thus urged, Dick half mechanically changed the direction of his mare's head.

No sooner had he done so than Black Bess bounded off at a speed that made thousands of sparks fly from the rugged stones with which Drury Lane was paved.

His brain was on fire. Liquid lead seemed coursing through his veins, while his heart seemed to stand still in his breast, and to have become congealed into a mass of solid ice.

In such a state of frenzy as he then was, no one can be surprised that he should urge his mare to redoubled speed, thinking, perhaps, by that means he should be able to outdistance thought—or rather the agonising recollection of what had just occurred.

But before we follow him in his headlong flight—that flight which was destined more than anything else to per-

petuate the remembrance of himself and steed—we will devote a few words to what took place at the inn, in order that, having done so, we may follow him throughout his long and eventful ride without being under the necessity of making any interruption.

In the first place, then, we may state that Old Matthew spoke no more than the truth when he said that Tom King was already beyond all human aid.

The bullet from the pistol of his best friend had done its work effectually.

So narrow, though, was the escape of the police officer, that the bullet, in its course, cut off the lower part of his ear, and made a rather deep, ugly-looking furrow along one cheek before it finally found a lodgment in the heart of the highwayman. Old Matthew had been a spectator of the whole of the disastrous affair, which, although we have been some time in describing it, because we have mentioned every detail, yet seemed to him no more than a momentary scuffle.

Even had he felt the inclination to take any share in the affray, he would not have had the opportunity, for before he could possibly re-collect his faculties, Tom King was lying on the ground.

The officer struggled to his feet, scarcely knowing whether he was alive or dead.

Blood poured copiously from his hideous-looking wound, and ere long the frightful smarting which it set up brought him to himself.

The first thing Old Matthew did was to bound forward and stoop down over the prostrate form of the highwayman.

He placed his hand just above the region of the heart.

It was covered with blood in an instant.

But there was not the feeblest pulsation, and a glance at the features showed that they bore the unmistakable impress of Death.

It was then that Old Matthew addressed those words to Dick which we have already recorded.

Then, having spoken, he turned his attention once more to the prostrate form.

The reader will scarcely require to be told how deep and sincere was Old Matthew's grief, for, from the first, Tom had ever been one of his especial favourites.

The wounded officer feeling no inclination to join in the pursuit which had just been set on foot after Dick Turpin, came forward a step or two, and addressing the landlord, said:

"There's one more of your pets done for, my friend; and the one that remains won't hold his life and liberty many hours longer. The precautions taken are such as will make escape totally impossible."

"And you will carry a mark that will remind you of to-night whenever you happen to look in a glass," returned Matthew, who, after one glance at the officer's bleeding physiognomy, turned shuddering away.

The officer solaced himself by giving vent to some horrible curses.

Then he added:

"I can put up with it, and could put up with a great deal more. I captured him single-handed—I knew I could do it if I only had a fair trial, and so you see I shall have no one to divide the reward, and therefore I shall be quite content."

"People's ideas about contentment widely differ," remarked Old Matthew. Then, in an altered tone, he said:

"What is to be done with this poor fellow?"

"Done with him?" repeated the officer, for he was not prepared with an immediate answer.

"Yes; what is to be done?"

"D—d if I know!"

"Let him be carried indoors," suggested Old Matthew, "otherwise there will be such a crowd about our ears as will prevent us from doing anything."

"I don't know what to do," observed the officer, still busy in his attempts to check the flow of blood from his wound. "But he's dead, and therefore there is nothing to fear about his escaping, so we will carry him in."

Old Matthew beckoned the ostler to come to his assistance, and between them the body of poor Tom King was carried into that room where he had stood only a few minutes before indulging in such bright hopes about the future.

Matthew had much ado to conceal his emotion, nor could he have been able to do so but for the thought that the manifestation of any particular sorrow upon his part might be the means of getting him into much future trouble.

The officer bawled lustily for a surgeon to dress his wound.

"I'll send my report to head-quarters, and sit down here till I hear further," he said, in tones of dogged determination; "and if I stir, blow me! Ten thousand devils! where is the surgeon?"

The pain in his cheek now every moment increased in severity, and it had already reached such a pitch as to be almost unendurable.

Matthew occupied himself in covering Tom over with a sheet; and having thus done for him all that lay in his power, he withdrew to give full vent to his grief.

"Who would have dreamed it?" he said, wringing his hands. "It seems now to be hardly possible. Dead—and at such a moment! To fall by Dick's hand, too—that is strangest of all—and to think that he should dread the occurrence of some such event! What will be Dick's feelings now? He declared himself tired of life before—how will he be after this?"

Such was the nature of the landlord's reflections.

As for the officer, true to his purpose, he remained beside the dead highwayman.

His wound was dressed, and by the time this operation was completed other police officers arrived.

After much discussion it was finally determined that Tom's body should remain where it was until after the inquest, when a further resolution could be made.

This course was carried out, the body all the time being under the guard of a troop of officers.

The official inquiry as to the cause of death was duly made, and the various facts deposed to.

The verdict was one of wilful murder against Dick Turpin, for whom, on this account, though it seems strange to say it, an additional reward was offered.

In this way the affair ended.

With a dead body—though it was that of a daring offender—the law could do nothing.

An effort was indeed made to have it buried within the precincts of Newgate, but Old Matthew got some persons to come forward to claim the body as that of a relative, and of course it was handed to them.

The melancholy duty of finding a last resting-place for the senseless clay then remained, and Old Matthew performed it in a manner which he felt certain would be approved of by Dick himself.

Most anxiously, then, he waited to hear intelligence of the captain, of whom since the moment of his departure he had heard no tidings.

It now becomes our duty to follow Dick, yet first of all we must mention one of Mr. Skellum's manoeuvres.

It was one which did credit to his ingenuity, and it must be confessed that had it been put into execution earlier, the career of the highwaymen must have been brought to a full stop.

The plan was simply this:—

On every high-road leading from London he made arrangements at the various posting-houses that horses to the number of at least half a dozen should be kept in constant readiness for him.

The reason of this is obvious.

He trusted that the time was not far off when one or other of the highwaymen would be started from their place of concealment.

When this was done, the officers who were first upon his track were to ride him down, which the continual relays of fresh horses procured without an instant's delay, would doubtless enable them to do.

At all risks, they were not to lose sight of their prey after having once started it.

His instructions were that they should not exhaust themselves in endeavouring to overtake and make a capture, but solely be directed to keeping steadily upon the track.

How these instructions were carried out, and what was the effect of them, will now be very shortly seen.

Certainly, however, these energetic measures seemed

to promise ultimate success to Mr. Skellum and his party.

CHAPTER MXCII.

OLD MATTHEW STANDS A FRIEND TO POOR TOM KING FOR THE LAST TIME.

DICK TURPIN'S sensation of agony increased a thousandfold as he rode at that mad gallop along Drury Lane.

Although, strictly speaking, he was not to blame for what had occurred, he, nevertheless, blamed himself bitterly, and suffered the liveliest sensations of remorse and horror.

His state of mind, however, is so far beyond our powers of description that we shall pass it over almost in silence.

We can only say that it was in a state closely bordering upon frenzy that he continued to urge his mare onward in a northerly direction.

Where he was going he never troubled himself to think, though that he should take this course, as one may say, almost mechanically, is not to be wondered at when it is remembered that Tom King and himself had agreed to go to York.

At present, however, he had no thought that this should be his destination.

At length the very steep ascent of Stamford Hill was reached, and Black Bess, being left entirely to herself, thought fit to reduce her speed to a walk.

It was this change in the rate of motion that brought Dick Turpin to a sense of where he was.

He looked around him in the utmost surprise for a moment or so.

Then, recognising the locality, he allowed his mare to proceed, while he again overwhelmed himself with vain reproaches.

"To think that it should be this hand that should deprive my old comrade of his life!" he exclaimed, clenching his right fist violently. "To deprive him of it, too, just at the moment when his future began to look bright and worth living for! The prophecy is fulfilled. How strange that it should be so! If I received some intimation of my own fate, I should be far from disregarding it now, however unlikely it might appear.

"And what is to be the end of all?" he asked himself, at length. "I stand alone. One by one my cherished companions have fallen, and I am left alone—alone: no, not alone—that can never be while Black Bess is with me. May I never live to see the day that she is taken from me! If the day ever does come, I shall be desolate indeed."

He patted her neck fondly while he spoke, and Black Bess testified to the pleasure she felt at this recognition on the part of her master.

He little thought how close the time was when this separation would take place, and how soon he would have to experience the intense bitterness of utter desolation.

A moment afterwards, and he paused at the old toll-gate.

"Here's a guinea," said Dick, as he flung the coin named to the tollkeeper. "I always choose to pay in advance. The next time you see me coming, mind you have the gate open."

"All right, your honour," returned the man, placing one finger at the side of his nose and shaking his head in a very knowing manner. "Don't you trouble about that."

Dick rode on very leisurely.

He had no motive for making unusual speed, for he had no idea that he was pursued.

It was easy to see that he was thinking deeply, no doubt he was endeavouring to decide upon some course of future action.

There were many difficulties in the way of this, and before he had at all overcome his perplexity he was aroused by a peculiar sound that Black Bess gave utterance to.

"Hilloa!" he cried. "What does this mean? Steady, old lass—steady—steady! Can you hear anything—eh?"

Black Bess came to a full stop, as though to allow her master the opportunity of listening.

Dick turned half round in the saddle, and placed his hand to his ear.

"Horsemen are coming," he said; "but surely not in pursuit of me. No—no. If so, I should have heard of them long ere this. I will go quietly, and keep a sharp lookout."

It may seem strange that Dick did not seek safety in instant flight; but just then, to tell the truth, he was not in the mood for taking active measures of any kind.

The great incentives to preserve his life and liberty no more existed—life was a thing which he had ceased to prize.

The lapse of a few seconds rendered it beyond doubt that horsemen were coming—not in very large numbers, but at an unusually rapid rate.

"I will make sure whether they are after me or not," he muttered. "I won't take a long ride into the country unnecessarily, I am determined."

So saying, he caused his mare to turn her face towards the direction whence the sounds came, and calmly waited to find out whether his conjectures were well or ill-founded.

He was not allowed to remain very long in his state of incertitude.

Although the night was dark, he presently made out the forms of approaching mounted men, nor did he require them to come very close for him to be certain that they were police officers.

It seemed, however, that it was close enough for them to see him, and consequent upon this discovery they all set up a loud shout.

There were in all about eight well-mounted men, all intent upon the capture of the highwayman.

But the sight of so many armed men close to him, and literally thirsting for his blood, caused him no sensations of dismay.

On the contrary, it would seem as though the mere sight of them did much towards bringing back some of his old boldness of demeanour.

Be this how it may, it is a fact that his manner underwent a great alteration.

In the first place, he took off his hat and, after waving it in an elaborate fashion in the air, made an ironical bow.

Then, raising his voice, he exclaimed:

"If you are inclined for a good long ride along the Old North Road, I shall not for a moment think of baulking your desires. You will excuse me taking the precedence of you, but I allow no one to ride before me unless he has proved himself to be a better man than I am myself. Besides, I shall be able to clear the way of all obstructions, and all you have to do is to follow me just so far as your inclination may lead you."

The reader may perhaps be able to imagine how intensely aggravating these bantering words were to the police officers.

They heard nearly every syllable that fell from Dick's lips—so close, in fact, were they that the foremost of the troop made a trial with his pistol.

But the bullet whistled harmlessly past the highwayman, who, again bowing profoundly, replaced his hat and rode away at a round pace, yet by no means so quickly as to take him out of sight of his enemies.

The police officers were frantic with rage.

"Curse the villain!" cried the one who had fired the pistol. "It is bad enough to put up with the annoyance of failing continually, but to be insulted and braved in this fashion is outrageous. But come on, my boys, the devil himself must have led him on to this road, for, as you know, Mr. Skellum is somewhere on this road. If he falls in with this rascal he'll make him change his tune, I'll warrant!"

"Push on, then," said another voice. "We ought to keep close behind, and by no means lose sight of him; then, should he come up with Mr. Skellum, he will find himself between two fires, d—n him!"

The last two words were spoken with so much emphasis that all the rest laughed loudly.

"There he goes!" said another. "Look—look! He is behind those fir trees now! You will see him again in a moment. Yes—yes, there he is!"

In effect, while the officer thus spoke, Dick Turpin emerged from the protecting shadow of some tall trees that grew by the wayside, and could now be distinctly seen.

The officers finding that his speed was not very extraordinary, became at once flushed with hopes of success, and plied whip and spur most vigorously.

What added most, however, to the anticipation of success was the fact that Mr. Skellum was on the road before them at the head of another troop.

After what he had accomplished all began to show Skellum a great deal of attention, and place great belief in his powers.

"I will tire them out," said Dick, mentally, as he kept Black Bess rather tight in hand. "I should like to know how far they would follow me."

"There's something the matter with his horse," was the impression of the police officers. "Hurrah! we shall have him to-night after all! There must be something the matter that prevents him from going any faster."

This, as the reader knows, was an entirely erroneous idea; but it was quite a feasible thing to the officers, and it formed for them an additional and powerful incentive to make every exertion.

CHAPTER MXCIII.

DICK TURPIN COMMENCES HIS LONG RIDE.

THE excitement caused by finding himself thus closely pursued was most agreeable to the feelings of Dick Turpin, for it prevented him from dwelling upon those terrible events which had so weighed him down.

While galloping along the high-road with half a score of well-armed police officers in the rear, all intent upon his destruction, it was hard to turn his thoughts to other matters.

The feeling to Dick was similar to that experienced by anyone who unexpectedly finds an entire relief from bodily pain.

"They will find me in the humour to ride," he said, as he glanced behind him. "I only hope they will not soon tire. They are coming on too fast, however, to be able to keep up the pace."

To the utter astonishment, then, of the police officers Dick continued to keep just such a distance before them as to be out of the range of their pistols; and, strangest of all, no matter how great their efforts, they could not reduce this distance one inch.

Suddenly, however, Dick was warned by Bess that some one was approaching in front, for he was too much occupied to notice the circumstance himself.

It was now a little lighter than it had been, for the moon had reached a point where the clouds were less opaque than elsewhere, and, consequently, a dim light was shed all around.

Turpin looked very attentively in front, and, in less than a moment he made out the forms of five horsemen.

His first thought, of course, was that they must be police officers, but this he found to be an error.

By the careless way in which they rode along, chatting to each other, and occasionally indulging in a laugh that rang out sharply in the clear air, it seemed certain that they were gentlemen devoid of any particular business, and merely riding for amusement.

At the outset Dick had drawn a pistol, but now he returned the weapon to the holster.

In reconnoitring those in advance, he had unwittingly fallen further into the rear than was prudent.

The officers, elate with anticipated triumph, redoubled their efforts.

They caught sight of the approaching horsemen, and set up such a shout as instantly drew their attention to them.

"Stop him!" they bawled, at the top of their lungs—"stop him! A highwayman—a highwayman! Stop him! A hundred pounds reward!"

Owing to the stillness of the night, for there was no sound save that produced by the iron-shod hoofs of the

horses, these words were distinctly heard by the gentlemen in front.

For a second they seemed so surprised as to be incapable of action, but recovering themselves quickly, they placed themselves in a line across the roadway, doubtless thinking that the adoption of this course would stay the further progress of the fugitive.

But they knew not the man with whom they had to deal.

"Stand firm!" bawled the officers. "Whatever you do, stand firm! A hundred pounds reward!"

The gentlemen seemed fully inclined to obey this command.

Dick spoke to Black Bess.

It was only one word that he pronounced, accompanied by a slackening of the rein.

But the effect was as immediate as extraordinary.

At one bound she changed the gentle rate at which he had been going to her old tremendous swinging gallop.

The onward rush of the highwayman and his steed can now be compared to nothing but a whirlwind.

"Stand aside!" he cried, in a loud voice, that made itself distinctly heard above everything else. "Stand aside, or your death be on your own heads!"

The furious onward rush of the highwayman dismayed the travellers.

With more alacrity than was compatible with either dignity or courage, they drew to one side and allowed the furious horseman free passage.

There was a bend in the road not very far in advance, and round this Black Bess sped at the same rate, and was then entirely lost to view, though the sharp clatter of her hoofs upon the stony roadway could still be heard.

Upon seeing what we have described take place, the officers gave vent to the most awful imprecations conceivable.

So enraged were they at the pusillanimity of the travellers that they chose rather to pull up their horses and pour out their abuse than continue the pursuit.

"D—n ye for fine curs!" said the first constable, who followed on with some flowers of speech best left unexpressed. "Why couldn't you stand firm and bar his passage? If you had only shown a little firmness, he would have been in our hands by now."

"Do you know who you are talking to, sirrah!" cried one of the travellers.

"Yes," was the angry reply—"a set of d—d white-livered hounds that couldn't stop a single man among you!"

"You shall smart for this conduct!" said another traveller. "Things have come to a fine pass indeed when gentlemen can be abused by a set of d—d scum-of-the-earth police officers! Get out of the way, and let us ride on!"

"Yes, we'll get out of the way, never fear!" was the sneering response. "And the next time you come out you had better bring your wet nurses with you! Come on, lads!" he added—"its no good dilly-dallying here!"

So saying, he rode on, followed swiftly by his companions, all of whom amused themselves by cursing and swearing and saying what might have been done if the travellers had only showed a bold front.

The travellers, meanwhile—who happened to be a party of noblemen—rode towards London, vowing vengeance upon all the police officers in the land.

We will leave both parties to follow Dick Turpin.

When Black Bess bounded off at the tremendous pace we have mentioned, her rider's sensations were those of joy and triumph, succeeded by the consciousness that the headlong rate at which they were now going was even more exciting still.

Away, then, he flew, for he allowed the reins to fall loosely on his coursers' back, and let her go at what speed she chose.

What distance along the high-road was travelled in this manner he had no clear idea, but all at once he perceived several twinkling lights.

"That must be Edmonton," he said, to himself. "We have come further than I thought. No matter, I have distanced them now, no doubt, for they would never think of continuing the chase after seeing Bess lay out

in the way she did. It would be madness on their part to think of overtaking her. I will just go on as far as the Old Bell, and stop there awhile. There is time yet," he added, with a heavy sigh—"plenty of time for me to decide what I am to do in the future."

By slow degrees he reduced his mare's gallop so as not to enter the village at such a speed as to excite too much attention, and after the lapse of a few moments pulled up in front of the ancient, well-known inn.

Many lights were shining from the various windows, and sounds of high revelry reached his ears, as though some unusual merry-making was going on within.

A moment or two elapsed before the ostler made his appearance, and the delay caused Dick to alter his mind.

"No—no," he muttered. "Be it how it may, I will not stop here. Such mirth and jollity as now take place beneath the old roof would jar too painfully upon me. I will have something now I have stopped, and so shall Bess; but I will not alight—no—no—I will not alight!"

Just as he had arrived at this determination the ostler came forward.

"Humbly beg your pardon, sir, for keeping you here waiting for so long, but, you see, to-night is an uncommon busy one. I'm most run off my legs. What might your honour want?"

"A bucket of water with a pound of oatmeal in it, a whisp of hay, and a glass of the best brandy you have in the house."

"Right, sir. Will you step inside?"

"No, I will stay here—be quick."

"Depend upon me, your honour."

The ostler vanished, and Dick looked attentively at his mare.

Few persons would have suspected that she had travelled so far, and part of the time so rapidly.

Not a hair was turned.

All over her coat was as glossy and sleek as velvet, and her respiration scarcely, if at all, accelerated.

The nostrils were a little distended, but not sufficiently so as to attract notice.

"Brave Bess," said Dick, patting her fondly, while his heart throbbed and his eyes glistened with joy and pride. "There may have been your equal in the world before, and there may be in time to come, but I doubt both. I have never tried your mettle yet, but you could accomplish a miracle, old lass, I will be bound you could, if you were only put to it. You are the only earthly possession I have left now," he added, in a subdued voice, and with a fresh access of emotion.

Just then the ostler appeared, carrying with him the articles ordered.

The refreshment was truly welcome to both, especially to Dick, who felt like one parched with fever.

The liquor he had called for was not at all calculated to allay his thirst; but he never thought of that, and swallowed the fiery spirit at a draught.

"Put the hay in the rack," he said, "and leave her the bucket. There is no occasion for hurry; and get me another glass."

"Of brandy, sir?"

"Yes, a larger glass than that."

The ostler hurried off, and almost immediately reappeared, carrying a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other.

"This has only just been uncorked," he said, "and you can have just as much as you like."

The glass was a rather large goblet.

Dick filled it to the brim.

"Drink the rest yourself," he cried, giving back the bottle, "and drink to the health of the best steed in England."

As he spoke, he drank deeply of the contents of the glass—so deeply as to make the ostler open his eyes to a most unusual width.

But, for all that, he did not neglect the toast.

Disdaining the luxury of a glass, he placed the neck of the bottle between his lips and allowed the brandy to gurgle down his throat.

"The best steed in England!" he ejaculated, as soon as he had recovered breath after his draught. "And may I make so bold as to ask which that is?"

"This," answered Dick, stroking the beautiful arched neck of Black Bess.

"That?" said the ostler, looking at her with a critical eye. "Well, so far as I can tell, I should think you are not far off the mark."

"I am sure I am not," said Turpin, finishing his huge draught, and speaking with an enthusiasm that might have been in part caused by what he had drunk.

At this moment a loud yelling sound broke the silence.

Dick had so completely given up the idea that he was pursued that he had never listened, and consequently had failed to hear the rattling of horses' hoofs in the distance which had been audible for some moments.

Looking up now, he was astonished to find his pursuers within a few yards of him.

How they had managed to get up with him so quickly passed his comprehension.

They saw him, too. The yelling shout was sufficiently indicative of that fact.

"Those gentlemen seem troubled about something," he said, in a calm voice, as he slowly placed the empty glass in the ostler's outstretched hand. "I wonder what is the matter? However, it is no business of mine. Good night!"

CHAPTER MXCIV.

DICK TURPIN TELLS HIS FOES THAT THEY WILL HEAR OF HIM IN YORK.

THE presence of the police officers at Edmonton at that juncture, although well-nigh incomprehensible to Dick Turpin, was like many other seemingly mysterious events, one of the simplest things in the world.

The reader will remember what has been said about Mr. Skellum's arrangements for relays of horses.

Now it so happened that on the North Road, Tottenham was the first place beyond London appointed for that purpose.

Through this village Dick had gone at headlong speed.

The officers, however, burning with resentment and more determined than ever after what had occurred that they would not lose sight of the fugitive, knowing that fresh horses could be had at such a short distance ahead, urged the exhausted beasts they bestrode to make yet greater speed.

Arriving at Tottenham, only the briefest possible delay took place.

It happened also that the steeds which they procured in exchange were of far more than ordinary quality, and consequently by dint of perpetually belabouring the animals with the stocks of their heavy whips, and goading them with their spurs, they succeeded in reaching Edmonton as we have described.

But such was the violence with which they had treated their horses immediately after coming out of the stable that they were now nearly half blown, and exhibited many signs of distress.

"Death and the devil!" said the foremost, furiously, to the wondering ostler. "Why didn't you stop that man? There's a couple of thousand pounds to be had for his head! That is Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

"Blow me!" ejaculated the ostler, with great emphasis.

"Why, I might have known it."

"Of course you might! How is his horse?—Is it fresh?"

"A d—d sight fresher nor yours?"

"Get on," said the officer—"don't spare the horseflesh. We have not to take these many miles. If we keep on his track we must run him down at last; and when he is deprived of his horse he will be at our mercy entirely."

Cheered by this prospect, the officers recommenced their efforts, and in a few moments the Old Bell Inn at Edmonton was left behind.

What encouraged the officers still more was that every now and then the light wind would bring to their ears faint clatter of Bess's hoofs, showing that she could

such a very long distance in advance.

Leaving the officers to continue their pursuit, we will again accompany the highwayman.

As might be expected, the fumes of the vast quantity of brandy he had swallowed began to mount up to his brain, which, added to the exhilaration produced by his hard riding, caused a most unusual elation of spirits.

That kind of oblivion of unpleasant recollections which follows partial intoxication wrought its full effect upon him.

At first he pondered a little upon the means by which his foes had been enabled to get so close upon his heels; but after a few moments this became too perplexing and tiresome for his faculties to carry out.

"They seem in a mood to chase me," he muttered, as he brought his mare to a walk, for a long and steep hill lay before him. "It is doubling the reward that has done it, I suppose. Well—well, I will give them such a tiring as will make them think twice before they attempt to chase me again."

As Dick would not allow Black Bess to ascend this hill except at a walk, it follows that it took a considerable length of time to reach the summit.

The officers, who had not for a moment ceased to flog their horses, consequently gained upon him.

It was while slowly ascending that the idea of riding to York first occurred to him.

"Bess, old lass," he muttered, half aloud and half to himself, "no one knows the extent of your powers yet. Let me think. My determination—my irrevocable resolution is to quit my occupation of highwayman at once and for ever. Good! But, Bess, old lass, shall we, who have made together so great a reputation in the world—I say, shall we drop out of it thus obscurely?—shall we vanish without a sign, and so suffer our glories to be quite eclipsed? No, no," he added, in an exultant voice, for the brandy now was working its full influence upon him—"no, no! Before we quit this scene we will do that which shall cause us both to be remembered and spoken of throughout all future time. Yes, yes," he cried, with growing excitement, "we will do that which no one has done yet, and which most probably no one will ever attempt to do again. We will ride to York—to York: yes, yes—from London to York! Let me think. That is two hundred miles or thereabouts, and the fastest coach takes four days and nights. Ha, ha!—four days and nights! It is odd to me, Bess, if we do not do it in less than twelve hours. At any rate, we will try. What say you, old lass, shall it be so or not?"

Black Bess responded by that answering neigh which she always gave when her master spoke to her.

"So you are willing, then?" exclaimed the highwayman, "and so am I. It shall be done! At sunset to-morrow we will be at York."

He ratified his determination with an oath.

But the summit of the hill was now reached.

Instead of immediately commencing the descent, however, he came to a complete stop, and turned round so as to face his pursuers who, by dint of the almost superhuman exertions they had incessantly made, were about half way up the hill.

Just at this moment the moon peeped down at what was going forward.

To Dick and his foes, who had been for so long in obscurity, her light seemed absolutely brilliant: they could distinguish all around them with great ease and plainness.

"D—n his impudence!" said the foremost officer. "Why he is standing stock still. Is he going to stop there and let us take him?"

"No fear," growled one of his companions. "You had better look out. I am sure he means mischief."

"Push on—push on! If he will only remain where he is a little longer he will be within range, and then, at all risks, I will take a shot at him."

Dick calmly awaited their approach, and when they had got to what seemed a most dangerous proximity he took off his hat and bowed in the same insulting manner as before.

"Gentlemen all," he said, "I have a few remarks to make to you."

Hearing him speak, the officers mechanically checked their steeds and listened intently.

The tired beasts readily came to a standstill, and over and above their loud panting, they heard Dick say:



[DICK TURPIN ASTONISHED THE DRIVER OF THE YORK MAN-CHARGE.]

No. 288.—BLACK BESS.

No. 293.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

No. 239 will be Published next Monday.

"You seem to me, gentlemen, to be like I am—that is, just in the humour for a long ride. If you like to accompany me upon my journey, well and good; I have no objection—not the least in the world; but it will try your mettle. Gentlemen," he added, in a still louder voice, "if you want me, you will find me to-morrow morning at the old Bowling Green in the city of York; till then, farewell!"

As he pronounced the last words, he again waved his hat.

Then, turning round with surprising swiftness, he let go the rein, and away Black Bess flew down the steep declivity at what seemed to be a breakneck pace.

Just as he started, many bullets whistled about his ears, for the officers had recovered from their first astonishment.

Long and deep were the curses they breathed upon his audacity; but the object of their anger was unhurt, and was speeding along the high-road at a rate that seemed to set all probability of successful pursuit at defiance.

But the officers had the utmost faith in the arrangements made by Mr. Skellum, for whom, by-the-by, they had been for some long time past on the look-out.

Every moment they had expected him to join them; but now, as they got farther and farther away from London, their hopes began to wane, because of their impression that he would have had no object for riding so far away.

Although the police officers came down the long, steep hill with all the speed their horses were capable of making, and incurring no inconsiderable risk in so doing, yet the reader will not be surprised to hear that when they reached the level road Dick Turpin and Black Bess were out of sight.

The next changing-place was only about eight miles farther on, and so they did not scruple to urge their horses as before.

All at once, however, the attention of all was attracted by a cry given by one of their number.

"Look there," he cried, in a somewhat excited tone of voice, and pointing with his whip across the open country as he spoke—"look there! Do you see who is coming?"

"Who—who?" asked several anxious voices.

"Who?—why, Mr. Skellum, to be sure! Can't you see him? I could tell him a mile off."

"Yes—yes, I do believe it is; and what is more, if that is not Bill Jinks who is riding next to him it is odd to me."

"What is to be done?"

"Why, we will wait here a moment and signal to him. We shall perhaps get in for it if we don't let him know just how matters are at present."

"Of course we shall," assented another voice; "though why he should be over in that direction I cannot imagine."

There was little need to make any signals to Mr. Skellum, since he had already caught sight of the troop of police officers, and was making his way in a direct line towards them.

A few moments elapsed before his arrival.

He was most anxious to learn the news.

As soon as he heard that Dick Turpin had undoubtedly passed by such a short time before, he uttered a howl of rage, and then his vexation waxed so great that he pulled off his three-cornered hat and flung it on the ground with furious violence.

It was immediately trampled into the mud by the hoofs of the horses.

"Fool—ass that I have been!" were the first words he ejaculated; and he seemed more than half inclined to fling his dingy-looking wig down too.

The officers looked on in surprise.

"Here have I been riding myself nearly to death, thinking Dick Turpin was before me, and now I am convinced it was some one else. I was told it was Captain Hawk; but I would not believe it."

"Captain Hawk? Have you been in pursuit of him?"

"Didn't I say so?"

"And you have not captured him?"

"No fear. He rides like Dick Turpin himself."

"We shall have no little trouble with him, I expect."

"But you say that Dick Turpin himself is on the road before us, don't you?"

"Unquestionably."

"How do you know?"

"Because he told us that if we wanted him, we should find him to-morrow morning at the Bowling Green at York."

"At where?" bawled Skellum.

"At York."

"At the devil more likely! But"—and here Mr. Skellum seemed to speak more like himself—"if it is really his intention to ride to York his fate is sealed."

"How so?"

"Because of the relays I have upon the road. If he keeps to the highway, we shall be able, by our frequent changes, to overtake him before he has gone half the distance—ay, or a quarter of it."

Mr. Skellum spoke with an immense amount of confidence; but this feeling was by no means strongly shared in by the men, who considered much valuable time had been lost.

But Mr. Skellum very soon set them all in motion again.

CHAPTER MXXV.

BLACK BESS SAVES THE TOLLMAN THE TROUBLE OF OPENING THE TURNPIKE GATE.

DICK TURPIN did not attempt to tighten rein until he had placed at least twenty miles between himself and the spot where he had spoken to the officers.

The speed Black Bess had made, and the style in which she had done her work, filled him with enthusiasm.

If possible, he felt more certain than before that she would be able to accomplish the tremendous journey with comparative ease.

Although he was now something like thirty miles from Drury Lane, yet Black Bess did not give signs of having travelled more than three.

Slight as was the restraint he placed upon her with the view of moderating her pace, yet she chafed terribly beneath it, and seemed half inclined for once in the way to assert that she had a will of her own.

"You are full of mettle, my old lass," Dick said, as he patted her neck, "and you are beginning to feel a little excited. But quiet, Bess—quiet, I say!—I don't want you to exert yourself too much at present. You must husband your resources, for you have real need of doing so."

As he pronounced the last words he compelled her to walk; but it was easy to see that so far from being sensible of the least fatigue, Black Bess was just sufficiently heated to be desirous to do more.

To see the way in which she would at times try to change her present snail-like pace to gallop would almost induce the belief that she was conscious of the task that lay before her, and was full of impatience to accomplish it as speedily as possible.

The country, however, was now of a more uneven character than it had been, and Dick continually held her in.

In this way five more miles, or thereabouts, were accomplished, and then he perceived in front of him a small, twinkling light.

Drawing closer, he found that it proceeded from a window in the gable-end of a house, which, by its position, would seem to be a roadside inn.

The supposition turned out correct, and Dick resolved that at all hazards he would let his mare rest there for a short time.

The place seemed silent and deserted, and there was little to fear in the shape of an interruption.

The trampling of hoofs brought forth the ostler, who was, indeed, listening for and expecting an arrival, for this was one of Mr. Skellum's changing places.

Dick alighted, but he would not enter the house, nor would he allow Black Bess to enter the stable.

But he unloosed the saddle girths, and wholly removed the bridle, so as to relieve her mouth.

Then he stood by and saw her carefully rubbed down—Black Bess the while eating a little hay and quenching her thirst with water in which oatmeal had been mixed in a liberal proportion.

As the time went on without any sound indicative of the approach of his toes being borne to his ears, Dick began to think that they had abandoned all idea of pursuing

Whether this was so or not, however, he was determined not to relinquish his design.

There would be plenty of testimony as to the time when he left London, and it would be his own business to arrange that the hour of his arrival in York should be correctly noted.

"My lad," he said to the ostler as he prepared to ride away, "if you are asked, you need not be quite sure whether I am Dick Turpin, but you can say I am going to York."

He threw the lad a crown-piece as he spoke, and rode off, leaving the ostler in a state of considerable surprise and bewilderment.

Dick still went on slowly.

There was no urgent need for speed, and he knew he could not do better than perform the first half of his long journey with as little distress and extra exertion as possible.

Ere he had gone far, however, his quick ears caught the sound of horses' hoofs.

But the clatter died away again almost immediately, leaving him in doubt as to whether his ears had served him rightly.

Not for long, though, was he left in this state of indecision.

The sound broke forth again, and this time with a clearness that was unquestionable.

Dick looked behind him.

But the darkness was too great to enable him to see very far.

"I should like to know whether these are the same officers who are upon my track," he muttered. "If so, I should begin to think they were in earnest, and actually meant to follow me. I will stay and see."

There was no need to alter Bess's present speed, for she was going only at a walk, while those behind were coming at a hard gallop.

It was scarcely likely that they were any but police officers; but Dick chose to be quite certain; besides, it might have been a little bravado on his part.

At length they came in sight.

"They are the police officers," ejaculated Dick; "and it is odd to me if their numbers are not doubled. They have had a reinforcement somewhere—they are certainly in earnest."

A loud cry now made him aware that he was seen.

Mr. Skellum was full of exultation.

"I told you so!" he cried to his followers. "We have only to stick to him now and he is ours. No horse can possibly hold out against the relays I have provided. See how we have gained upon him already! Push on—push on!"

To tell the truth, the officers were no less surprised than encouraged upon finding that they had gained upon the highwayman in the way they had done; but they would not have felt half so ardent had they been in full possession of the exact facts of the case in the same way that the reader is.

On the other hand, had Dick known earlier about the relays kept constantly in readiness, it might have induced him to abandon his design.

As it was, they began to think with their leader, that their efforts at last were to be crowned with success.

Dick, finding there was no room for doubt about the character of his pursuers, rode off, though not so swiftly as he might have done, for he felt perfectly certain he could show them a clean pair of heels whenever he thought fit to do so.

But there was an obstacle in front about the existence of which he knew nothing.

Suddenly sweeping round a curve, he came in sight of it.

It was a toll-gate, and as the hour was now very late, it was closed, and so double-locked.

"Gate—gate!" roared Dick, as soon as ever he perceived the obstruction. "Gate—gate! Quick—quick, I say!"

The sound of his voice reached the ears of the tollman, and he at once scanted forth, lantern in hand.

"Quick—quick!" cried Dick, again, who was compelled to reduce his pace. "Open, I say—open!"

Before the gatekeeper could make any reply, the officers came in sight, and set up a yell like a pack of hungry wolves in sight of their prey.

Now we have him!" shouted Skellum, almost frantic with excitement. "Be firm and resolute—he cannot escape!"

Then raising his voice, he bawled aloud to the toll-keeper:

A highwayman—a highwayman! A thousand pounds reward! Keep the gate shut! Don't open it for the world!"

The tollman was so astonished that it is questionable whether he understood what was said to him.

But this astonishment was quite as bad to Dick as a fixed determination to keep fast the gate, for he was deprived of action altogether.

What was to be done?

There was little or no time to deliberate upon this question.

The officers were fearfully close behind, though they did not come on quite so fast as hitherto, because they were getting their weapons in readiness and preparing for an encounter.

But Dick's mind was soon made up.

Indeed, so quickly did he come to a decision, that one would have thought his resolution had been taken long beforehand.

"Since it must be so," he muttered, "here goes! You can do it, Bess, I know."

With these words, to the intense amazement of everybody, he faced about, and for, perhaps, the space of a moment, the extraordinary phenomenon of a highwayman riding full tilt at advancing officers might have been observed.

"Stand firm!" cried Skellum, at the top of his voice.

He thought, and not unreasonably, that Dick intended to make a bold dash through their ranks.

"Be ready," he cried—"here he comes!"

The officers formed themselves into a compact and most formidable barrier across the road.

But to their still further astonishment—not to say dismay—Dick faced round again and rode towards the gate.

Black Bess knew what was required of her.

Collecting all her energies, she rose in the air and cleared the gate in most beautiful style, her hoofs not so much as grazing the bristling row of spikes with which the topmost bar of the tollgate was garnished.

Of course the reader knows Dick's reason for riding back towards his foes.

It was because he was too close to the gate for a leap to be taken safely.

By adopting the course described he was, as we have seen, completely successful.

To describe the fury and disappointment experienced by the officers would be far beyond our powers.

They were absolutely frantic, but none more so than Mr. Skellum.

This was on account of the mistake he had made.

But for falling into the blunder of preparing to receive Dick's charge, he fancied that the prize might now have been his.

Now the chance seemed further off than ever, for Black Bess was already lost to sight in the darkness, though the clatter of her hoofs and her rider's mocking laugh of triumph still rang in his ears.

"Open the gate now, you fool, and be as quick as you can about it!" cried Skellum.

But the tollman had now recovered from a portion of his bewilderment.

What had greatly contributed to this, was the knowledge that he had been cheated out of his due.

"Who are you calling a fool?" he asked, angrily, and without moving an inch towards obeying the command he had received.

"Come—come," said Skellum, making an attempt to moderate his wrath, "open the gate quickly, or we shall lose the rascal after all."

"Give me the money first, and then I will," was the dogged answer.

"Open, I say! We are the King's officers! Beware how you obstruct us in our duty!"

"I don't care if you are the King himself," was the, if possible, more dogged than ever reply; "and as for obstructing you in your duty, take my word, you don't pass through this here gate without paying. It's tuppence apiece."

Mr. Skellum swore awfully.

"You had better give him the money," urged the officer next to him, "or we shall never get through to-night. There's just a dozen of us, including yourself, so it will be exactly two shillings."

Skellum ground his teeth and thrust his hand into his pocket, from which he drew forth the requisite amount.

"Here, fellow! Take it, and open the gate quickly, or you may suffer for your obstinacy."

The man did no more than growl by way of reply.

Then in the most leisurely and aggravating manner possible, he held up his lantern and proceeded to count "heads," as he called it.

Skellum was in agony.

"Will you let us through or not?"

"Seven—eight," said the tollman, not heeding him, and going on steadily with the counting business.

"Open the gate, or I'll break your d—d neck for you!" yelled Skellum, almost black in the face.

"Eleven—twelve," said the tollman, lowering his lantern, "and one that went over the top, thirteen. I want just tuppence more."

That was the last drop in Skellum's cup which caused it to overflow.

He was about to descend from his steed and inflict summary chastisement upon the refractory tollman, when doubtless a regular *fracas* would have ensued, but one of his men seized him by the arm while another shipped the extra twopence into the tollman's outstretched palm, who no sooner felt the coins than he hastened to open the gate.

CHAPTER MXCVI.

MR. SKELLUM FINDS HIS TASK MORE DIFFICULT THAN HE IMAGINED IT.

It was only the rattle of the key in the padlock that restored Skellum to something like composure.

Still, it was only by a very great effort that he controlled himself; but he was enabled to do so by the reflection that if he alighted so much time would be lost that the pursuit of Dick would be a hopeless matter.

But for all that, he shook his clenched fists and vowed vengeance upon him ere long.

The tollman took his threats with marvellous composure, however.

The next moment the ponderous gate swung open; and when there was no bar to their progress all things were forgotten in the general desire to get upon the track again as speedily as possible.

The excited fancy of the officers made them think that the delay had been much greater than it was in reality.

Still, the time had been long enough for Black Bess to get out of hearing.

"Never mind," said Skellum—"we shall make up that, no doubt, for the fellow has but the one horse, and the farther he goes the more tired he must get, while as for us, we are continually having fresh ones, so that, you see, we must get the advantage in time."

The men seemed encouraged and satisfied with this prospect, which certainly seemed reasonable enough.

Their cattle at present were, comparatively speaking, fresh, and under the combined stimulus of whip, voice, and spur, got over the ground at an amazing rate.

Dick, however, was not going so rapidly.

Not on account of any flagging upon his mare's part, but because the road was hard and heavy, and he was nursing her powers for a final effort.

After little more than an hour's hard riding, the sound produced by the hoofs of Black Bess striking against the hard roadway reached their ears.

This caused them to redouble their efforts.

More whip, more spur, more cries, and then, as the moon once more broke through the clouds which had obscured her light, they found themselves within sight of the highwayman.

"The reward is as good as in our pockets!" cried Skellum, by way of animating his followers. "You can see his horse is growing more and more exhausted; and bear in mind at the next inn we come to we shall find horses ready and waiting for us. We shall be able to make better speed than ever. Rely upon it, another dozen miles must settle the business!"

The officers inwardly most devoutly hoped that this

would prove to be the case, for though, for the most part, they were well used to the saddle, yet this long gallop without any rest told greatly upon them.

Of course Dick heard them not far behind him, but the circumstance failed to cause him the least uneasiness.

He knew perfectly well that he could, without difficulty maintain a safe distance between himself and them, no matter how great their speed.

Owing to his care Black Bess evinced no more tokens of distress than when he made his first halt at Edmonton.

As the officers came on he slightly increased his speed, a thing easily enough accomplished, for all he had to do was to allow the rein to fall a little loose on her neck.

Onward then she stretched, covering the ground with scarcely perceptible exertion.

Mr. Skellum saw that the distance between them, if not increasing, was certainly no less than before.

"Whip and spur!" he cried aloud, suiting the action to the word as he thus spoke. "Bear in mind that at the very next inn we come to we can change these brutes. Don't forget that. We are sure to have him."

Dick Turpin, riding on, came, presently, to the inn of which Skellum had thus spoken.

It was a most peaceful, picturesque dwelling—looking especially so now that the slant rays of the setting moon fell upon it.

Fain would Dick have paused there a moment or two for his mare's sake, in that quiet spot; and as he dashed by his eyes were turned wistfully towards it.

But a halt then, no matter how brief, was utterly impossible, and Black Bess continued on her course.

On this occasion, however, Dick became acquainted with the tactics of his pursuers.

How they had contrived to keep up with him so long had hitherto been a complete mystery to him.

Now it was a mystery no longer.

They changed their horses at short stages.

It must be confessed that this discovery brought a slight shade of anxiety to his brow, but the expression quickly faded, and a glance of triumph and anticipated success succeeded.

"No matter," he exclaimed, in a determined voice, "they can have twenty horses each if they are so inclined, but I will keep my oath. I have sworn to ride to York, and I will do it in defiance of every obstacle."

As he uttered these last words he turned round towards his foes.

They were some distance in the rear, but, nevertheless, the now dim and sickly moonlight enabled him to distinguish them.

He uttered a loud shout.

The cry was an inarticulate one, and yet, for all that, wonderfully expressive of what he wanted to convey.

The sound was one of defiance and determination, mingled with contempt of their efforts.

This done, he not only allowed Bess the rein, but also spoke to her in animated tones, urging her to make use of her best powers.

This alteration was consequent upon the discovery he had just made.

To the intense mortification and disappointment, then, of Mr. Skellum and his party, Black Bess all at once doubled her speed, and in a few seconds got not only out of sight but out of hearing too.

But he was worked up to too great a pitch of desperation to think of abandoning the chase.

"It is but a flash in the pan!" he ejaculated, as he saw the countenances of his companions assume a dejected air. "It is like the lighting up of a candle just before it goes out. Keep on steadfastly, and remember that the race is not always to the swift."

Skellum certainly set his men a good example.

But, then, he had every incentive to exertion.

Moreover, by this time a personal feeling had begun to infuse itself into the matter.

Dick Turpin was not looked upon so much as a fugitive from justice and a breaker of the laws as he was considered to be a personal enemy, depriving them of that to which they believed themselves justly entitled.

This feeling was shared in by all the men, but particularly by Skellum, who was flushed with the success he had already met with, which made him feel that his reputation would not allow him to let Dick Turpin get off.

Consequently, although his horse was by no means the best, yet, by dint of great exertion, he contrived to keep well in advance of the rest, who could not for shame's sake lag far behind.

But Mr. Skellum was woefully deceived; ~~when~~ he thought that this increase in Black Bess's speed was only a sudden spurt which would be over in the course of a few minutes.

The gallant animal, for the first time almost that night, could be said to be putting forth her wonderful powers of speed and endurance.

"On, my lass!" her rider would cry, with glad some exultation. "On—on! Put forth your best speed, old girl; and when we reach the hundredth mile you shall have an hour or two's good rest; then, I know full well, you will be as fresh as ever, and well able to perform the rest of your long journey. On—on, my bonny Black Bess; there shall come a good rest after this!"

But judging by the rate at which she now flew onwards, one would have judged that there was little need to urge her.

The ground seemed to slip beneath her feet.

On and on—miles and miles of the level well-kept high-road are overpassed.

The moon has now quite sunk from sight behind the long, low-lying cloud on the western horizon.

There is no light upon the face of nature save that feeble illumination which proceeds from the thousand sparkling stars in the blue sky above.

About the hour Dick knows little, though the setting of the moon warns him that morning is coming on.

Then suddenly upon accomplishing the ascent of a long hill he finds before him a quiet-looking town of considerable extent.

There are but a few twinkling lights to be seen here and there, yet, in spite of the obscurity, the highwayman can make out the outlines of the buildings, while here and there a spire pointing upwards to the sky forms a conspicuous object.

"That should be Huntingdon," said Dick, as Bess galloped down the hill. "Yes—yes—it is—it is, for here is the sluggish river Ouse."

Before he had finished speaking the ancient town was entered, and Black Bess's hoofs raised a clattering uproar as she crossed the bridge with unabated speed.

Another moment and the town was left behind.

The open country was before him.

But Dick's breast was filled with exultation, and he manifested his joy by a thousand extravagant demonstrations.

More than sixty miles had now been accomplished since he had first set out.

Sixty miles! and he felt convinced that his journey had not occupied four hours.

But by degrees a great change came over Bess.

Her glossy skin had first of all got rough and staring with the sweat that dropped down from her sides in spots and fell upon the ground like drops of rain.

Her mouth was open and filled with white foam, which every now and then detached itself and flew in snowy masses upon her breast, her shoulders, and upon her rider.

Her nostrils, too, were widely expanded, and Dick could feel how much her respiration was accelerated.

None of these symptoms were, however, considered by her rider to be at all dangerous or calculated to excite apprehension.

"Forward—forward!" was still Dick's cry. "An effort for a little longer, and then you shall have rest. In spite of all their boasted arrangements the police officers must by this time be miles and miles behind. You shall rest even if I have to wait till they come up to us again. On, Bess, my lass, on—on!"

Although her speed was as great as ever it had been during the whole of the ride, yet upon hearing her master's voice addressing her in these tones, there was a palpable effort on her part to go faster and faster still.

Dick, in a kind of triumphant ecstasy, flung the reins upon her neck, and submitted himself wholly to her control.

Many and many were the wondering eyes turned upon him as he thus flew past travellers on the road, coming no sooner in sight than he had vanished again.

All were struck with wonder at the transient glimpses of

a man having every appearance of wildness about him, waving his arms in the air, and every now and then giving utterance to a loud cry, and a horse covered with white foam, and so reeking with perspiration as to leave a long train of vapour, like a mimic fog, gleaming behind it in the damp atmosphere.

Such an extraordinary apparition as this might well excite comment.

Unheeding everything, however, but the design which he had immediately in view, Dick Turpin kept on.

Another hour elapsed, and over twenty miles were added.

Still the road stretched out before him, and still he galloped on, though every mile now perceptibly increased his mare's distress.

The point which he had determined on was, however, such a huge distance on that he could not bring himself to think of allowing her to release her efforts.

Still Black Bess grew more and more exhausted.

For the first time her rider felt her flag.

As he did so his heart smote him.

She flagged again.

"Enough," he ejaculated—"I will try your powers no further, my old lass. We will make a halt at the next inn we come to."

At a slightly diminished speed a distance of about half a dozen miles was accomplished, and then Dick saw before him what he sought.

"Bravo, Bess!" he cried—"bravo, old girl! You have behaved yourself nobly—most gallantly; and now, no matter at what risk, you shall stop until your exhausted energies are restored. That is it, Bess! Quietly, now—quietly! That's it!"

CHAPTER MXCVII.

THE POLICE OFFICERS REACH THE STABLE IN WHICH DICK TURPIN AND BLACK BESS ARE RESTING.

"HILLOA!" cried Dick, in a loud voice, as he hammered furiously with the butt-end of a pistol against the gate communicating with the stable-yard of the inn—"hillock! Ostler—ostler, where are you? Hillock, I say!"

More knocking succeeded, and finally a gruff, harsh voice coming from some distance, said:

"Wait a bit, then—wait a bit, can't you? Have a moment's patience, do!"

"All right!" said Dick. "But the quicker you are the more it will be in your pocket."

"Eh?"

"I shall deduct a shilling off the amount I intend to give you for every moment you keep me waiting."

This avowal made a wonderful difference to the gruff voice, for it changed its tone and came nearer.

"I'm here—I'm here! Just give me time to undo the gate—that's all!"

Just as the voice finished, the gate opened, and showed who the speaker was.

He proved to be a tall, thin, wiry-looking individual, whose whole appearance bore the unmistakable stamp of a connection with horses and stables.

He carried a stable-lantern in his hand, and he held it up in a convenient position for dispersing the rays, for he was in no slight degree curious to see his nocturnal visitor.

But Dick was not inclined to stand even for a moment merely that the ostler might scrutinise him.

"Stand aside," he cried, imperatively, "and shut the door quickly."

The man obeyed, for there was something in Dick's manner that made him sensible it was best for him to do so.

Dick then, with great swiftness, slipped from the saddle.

Black Bess panted fearfully.

In order to ease her, Dick, with a nimbleness that astonished the ostler, removed the whole of her trappings, and flung them upon the ground.

"My eyes!" ejaculated the latter, "you seem to think you had been coming along a bit!"

"I have. Fetch me a whisp of hay or straw—now, in a moment!"

The man muttered grumblingly below his voice, but what it was Dick did not trouble himself to hear.

He was full of concern about his mare, and examined her with anxious solicitude until the ostler returned.

"Hold the light," cried Turpin, in the same tone of command—"hold the light, and I will do the rest."

So saying, he took a portion of the hay that had been brought, and, rolling it up in his hand, formed a kind of pad, with which he rubbed his mare from head to foot in a manner that called forth the warmest admiration and approval from the ostler.

"You'd get the prize at that job, gaffer," he said, almost as gruffly as ever. "I never saw it better done. Capital—capital!"

Dick went on steadily with his work, apparently unheeded of these appreciative remarks.

At length, when he had nearly made a finish, he asked:

"Can you get into the house?"

"Of course I can! What do you want?"

"A quart bottle of brandy."

"A quart?"

"Yes, I said a quart; and mind it is the very best you have in your house."

"Very well."

"And be quick! Put the lantern on the water-butt—that will do."

The ostler shuffled off, and Dick renewed his scrutiny of his mare.

"Not much the worse," muttered Dick, after a close investigation—"not much the worse; and after what I am about to do there will be very little the matter."

The ostler did not return, and, short as the time was that he had been absent, Dick was full of impatience.

Taking the lantern, he searched about for a stable-bucket, and, having found one, proceeded to fill it at the water-butt.

He had just finished this when the ostler came.

"Here's the brandy."

Dick could not wait to have the cork extracted in the usual way.

He set to work in a much more expeditious way by knocking off the neck by one dexterous blow with the butt-end of a pistol.

To the ostler's still further amazement Dick poured the brandy into the bucket, which was not much more than half full of water.

"My eyes!" he ejaculated, in wonder. "Will your mare drink that?"

"I don't intend to let her try."

"Maybe yourself, then?"

"No," answered Dick, as he allowed the last drops of the spirit to trickle out of the bottle; "I don't in a general way take the refreshment out of a bucket. Where's a sponge?"

"A sponge?"

"Yes."

"You shall have one in a moment."

The ostler's curiosity was now strongly excited, and the strong desire to know what he was going to do caused him to make use of the utmost expedition.

Quickly returning with the article required, he stood stock still to see what was going to happen next.

His surprise was, if possible, increased, when he saw Dick Turpin dip the sponge into the bucket of brandy-and-water, and proceed to bathe Black Bess thoroughly from head to foot.

By this means all fear of a chill was effectually precluded, while the strength of the spirit would cause a reactionary glow throughout the whole system.

It might not actually have been the case, but yet Dick fancied that already he could perceive the effects of what he had done—Black Bess seemed so far refreshed as to be able to recommence her journey.

She no longer panted for her labouring breath, her eye was no longer so dilated, her nostrils quivered less and were less expanded, while no foam appeared upon her lips.

During the last few moments, however, the ostler had been regarding the highwayman attentively, and now upon looking up he found the man's eyes fixed intently upon him.

He understood the glance, and said quietly, though at the same time he touched a pistol in a significant, not to say threatening manner:

"You know me!"

It was in vain for the man to deny, and perhaps it was

with the view of converting necessity into a virtue that he said:

"I do know you, captain, and I know your mare, too, and I am heartily pleased to see you both. You need not show your pistols—Ned Hartill is not the man you have got to be afraid of."

"I am glad to hear it," said Dick, extending his hand. "Depend upon it I shall not leave your services unrewarded."

"I know all about that," answered the man, who took the highwayman's proffered hand with what was manifestly pleased alacrity.

"Now show me the way to the stables."

"All right. This way—this way."

Leading Black Bess by the forelock, Dick Turpin followed his guide, and was not a little pleased to find the stable was a warm and comfortable one.

He would not speak or answer any questions until he had carefully mixed a meal of corn and placed it in the manger.

By the time he had done it, however, he felt himself utterly exhausted, and flung himself down at full length upon the straw, giving utterance as he did so to a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"You are right," he cried, in a voice which he strove to render sprightly and careless in tone. "We have ridden a long way."

"How far, captain?"

"From London."

"London?" ejaculated the ostler, in a way that showed he was greatly taken by surprise.

"Yes," responded Dick. "How far do you reckon it from here? About a hundred miles, do you not?"

"You are as good as a conjuror, for I believe I may say as it is as near to ninety-nine miles and three-quarters as makes no matter."

The highwayman's countenance lighted up with a smile of triumph.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he cried, exultingly.

"Knew what, captain?"

He did not think fit to answer this interrogation, however, but replied by asking another question.

"How long do you think I have been coming, Ned?"

"What, from London?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't know. You have come sharpish this last bit—perhaps a couple of days."

"A couple of days?" iterated Turpin, with a laugh of scornful derision. "A couple of days? What can the man be thinking of?"

"Less than that then, captain?"

"Less than that!" he echoed, contemptuously. "I don't know precisely what the hour may be now, but at nine o'clock last night I was in Drury Lane."

"Where's that?"

"Why, in the heart of London. What's the time now?"

"Look here," said the ostler, with a solemn air and extraordinary emphasis, "do you mean for to go for to tell me that you was in London last night?"

"I certainly was."

"Well, captain, if anybody else had told me that I should have up in a minute and said that's a lie."

"Never mind," said the highwayman, impatiently. "What is the time?"

"I'll tell you in a brace of snaps. I ain't got a gold and jewelled repeater, captain, but I've got a machine that will tell the time as well as the most of them."

After much tugging and struggling the ostler succeeded in producing from his fob something which he had very rightly designated a "machine."

It was one of the largest watches Dick had ever seen, and, of course, he had had in his time no ordinary experience.

"Bless me!" he ejaculated. "Why, you must have pocketed the eight-day clock by mistake!"

"Nothing of the sort, captain. This is one of the good old-fashioned sort of watches. This belonged to my grandfather, this did. It ain't like none of your new-fangled concerns, no bigger, perhaps, than your thumb-nail, but a regular out-and-outer—one that's got some works inside."

"So I should think," said Dick—"there's room enough. And if ever they build a church hereabouts I should re-

commend you to make the churchwardens a present of it. It would save putting the parish to the expense of a new clock for the steeple."

"Never mind, captain—poke your fun as much as you like."

"Tell me the time. Oh, I see, it's half-past four. I scarcely thought it so late," he added, with a slight shade upon his face.

"Now don't go for to make a mistake, captain. You don't know this here watch of mine like I do. It's got its peculiarities. Now it's just three o'clock, though an ordinary observer like yourself would think it was half-past four."

"That's more like the time," said Turpin, brightening up. "I was certain I had not been more than six hours performing the journey."

"Six hours! Why, captain, you don't mean to say you've rode that poor creature a hundred miles in six hours."

"I will take an oath of it at any minute."

"Well—well, no one would guess it to look at her now. Brandy-and-water is an excellent thing, captain—a wonderful thing."

"It is; and that reminds me that a little would be very acceptable to me. Fetch enough for the pair of us."

"Shall you stop long?"

"An hour or two."

"Then perhaps you would like something to eat?"

"Certainly I should. Run and bring me whatever you can lay hold of the quickest."

"All right."

He vanished.

As soon as the highwayman was alone, he murmured:

"Six hours—only six hours! Who will believe that the distance has been performed in so short a time? Why, let me see, the officers themselves, if they only keep up the chase, will be compelled to testify to it. We must not stop much more than an hour, old girl," he added, addressing his steed; "if we do, not only will your legs get stiff, but we shall not perform the journey to time. I can see now that we shall do it in twelve hours. Ha, ha! At nine o'clock last night there will be abundant testimony that I was in Drury Lane. I will take good care there is proof enough I am in York at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

The prospect of accomplishing this feat, which he looked upon already as almost achieved, presented itself more and more temptingly to his imagination.

At this moment the ostler returned.

He brought with him an abundant supply of provisions, as well as a bottle of brandy.

"There," he exclaimed, complacently, "we shall not do so very badly after all!"

As may be supposed, Dick Turpin by this time felt pretty keenly the pangs of hunger, which the sight of the food before him served to increase.

He began to eat ravenously, and while he was so engaged the ostler entered into conversation.

"You don't understand my watch," he began, "but it generally gains about thirty minutes every hour, and as it is about three hours since I wound it up, why, you see, of course it must be near enough an hour and a half too fast."

The ostler spoke with as much importance as though he had succeeded in establishing beyond all possibility of cavil some mathematical difficulty.

Dick nodded.

"And, oh!" he exclaimed, with great suddenness, and in very different tones, "there is something else I meant to tell you, but I have been in such a fluster like ever since you came that it quite drove it out of my head."

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing much. Are you pursued?"

"I think so."

"And where are the grubs?"

"A good many miles behind."

"Well, that may be; but just let me advise you to be careful."

"Careful? Why?"

"Get off this high-road as soon as you can."

"What for?"

"Because in the stable next to this we've got twelve horses all ready for instant use, in case the officers should ride up and ask for them."

"Can it be possible?"

"I will show you the animals if you like."

"No—no. I believe you—of course I believe you."

Dick pressed his hand to his forehead with a slightly troubled air.

"And how far have they carried out this plan?" he asked, after a pause. "Have they arranged changing-places as far as York?"

"I think so," was the cautious answer; "but, mind you, I don't say for certain. But, however, don't you go for to run the risk; get off across the country as soon as you can."

Dick shook his head with a very resolute air.

"You won't do it?"

"I will not."

"But why?"

"Because," said Dick, speaking with peculiar earnestness, "I have made a vow to ride to York—ay, and to be there when the clock in the old minster proclaims the hour of nine. Don't look so amazed, man—I have sworn to do it!"

"You must be mad!"

"Nothing of the sort. And as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow morning I shall be there."

"And you are going to ride poor Black Bess?"

"Yes. But why do you say 'poor'?"

"Because it will be the last journey she will make."

"Pho, pho!"

"It will finish her," said the ostler. "You can believe me or not, just as you think proper; but I have not lived all these years without knowing a thing or two about horseflesh."

"She will do it with ease."

"So you think."

"Look at her now."

"Ay, ay—I see her plain enough, but I know that mare's nature as well as if I saw the end. She will go and go at her full speed until the end of her power is reached. Mind, there will be no flagging—she will go till she drops under you as though struck by lightning."

The earnest way in which the ostler spoke made an evident impression upon Turpin.

He gazed affectionately upon his mare.

"If I lose her," he muttered, "I lose all I have on earth. If I thought it would end so— But no, no—better that she should perish thus than end her days at the knacker's yard. No, no—she shall die as she has lived. Besides, I have sworn it."

"And you are still resolved to go?"

"I will keep my oath."

"Then it is the same as signing her death-warrant."

"Why, look at her," cried the highwayman, who, having finished his repast, now rose and patted her upon the neck. "What sign of failure can you find about her? She is good for double the distance at this present minute."

The ostler shook his head as he firmly pronounced the word:

"Never!"

"Well, we shall see," was the reply. "She will either do it or perish in the effort."

"Then, if that is your determination," said the ostler, and it almost seemed as though the rough fellow's tones were tinged with sadness—"if your mind is made up, I will help you."

"Help me?"

"Yes; I would not do it, though, only I have heard that when Dick Turpin once decided upon a course, nothing had power to turn him from it."

"You heard rightly; and, what is more, he never was half so fixed in any determination as he is in this."

The ostler sighed, and then he repeated the words:

"I will help you."

"How—how?" asked Turpin, eagerly.

By way of reply, Ned went to a particular corner of the stable, and, standing on the corn-bin, felt about upon a narrow shelf that was fixed against the wall at some distance above his head.

He produced a small bottle containing some dark liquid, in quantity, probably about a couple of ounces.

"Take that," he said—"take that, and keep it carefully."

"What am I to do with it?"

"I will tell you. That bottle of stuff was given me by one of the cleverest fellows with horses that ever lived."

"But what is it for?"

"Do not be impatient. He assured me—and I would take his word for a thousand pounds—that this little drop poured down a horse's throat, even at the moment when he appeared to be completely worn out by exhaustion, would have the effect of filling his body with new blood—with new spirit."

"Can it be possible?" ejaculated Dick, taking the bottle eagerly.

"You may rely upon the truth of what I say. But let me entreat you not to make use of it unless you can help it."

"Why not?"

"Because I will not be answerable for the effects which it may leave behind it when its power has worked off."

"Then, rely upon it, I shall only make use of it as the last resort—when there is no other chance left."

"Enough."

Dick consigned the vial to a small pocket in his vest.

"I have kept the bottle by me until now, little thinking what I should do with it."

"You shall have a liberal recompense," said Turpin; "you will find that a highwayman knows how to pay for such services as these."

"Hark," said the ostler—"hark—hark! What is that?"

Dick immediately assumed a listening attitude.

But no particular acuteness of hearing was requisite.

Horses were close at hand.

The clatter of their hoofs upon the hard high-road could be heard with most unpleasant distinctness, for it showed that they were very close at hand.

Indeed, it will seem strange that their approach had not been heard earlier, but Dick did not anticipate their arrival so soon; besides, they had both been so entirely absorbed in discussing the qualities of the liquid in the bottle, that they had been insensible to all else.

Dick Turpin had no doubt that they were his foes who were outside, and he estimated the amount of desperation they would exhibit by the pertinacity with which they had kept upon his trail.

Although aided by horses as they had been, it was no trifling thing to ride so far in so short a period.

He was amazed, too, that they should arrive so soon, even after he had made every allowance.

But his brow darkened, and he sought his pistols with a menacing air.

"What are you going to do, captain?" cried Ned, as he rapidly secured the door of the stable. "What are you going to do?"

"Fight it out!" was the highwayman's laconic and grim reply.

"Nothing of the sort! Put up your barkers, captain—they will not serve you this time. Put them up, I say, and attend to me."

"What is to be done?"

"Help me on with the saddle and bridle, and while you are doing so I will tell you."

Dick did not hesitate to carry this mandate into execution.

With two pairs of such ready hands, Black Bess was very speedily accoutred.

But before Ned the ostler could say a word, a troop of horsemen stopped with a sudden dash at the yard gate.

Immediately followed a tremendous knocking.

Then came a furious peal upon the bell, and, in fact, such an uproar as probably never before had been heard at that old inn.

As Dick had rightly guessed, these horsemen were, indeed, the police officers who had chased him from London.

The indefatigable Mr. Skellum was still at their head, and, in fact, had it not been for his almost superhuman exertions the chase would have been abandoned long ago.

But he continued to keep the men tolerably well up to the mark by his perpetual assurances that the highwayman's steed could not possibly hold out much longer.

And these assertions received some colour from the accounts they received from the travellers on the road.

There was no difficulty in obtaining tidings of Dick—none in the least.

Everybody had seen him—everybody had noticed his

wild and haggard look, and commented upon his foaming, panting, and well-nigh exhausted steed.

By dint, then, of availing themselves of the relays provided, and never pausing a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, they contrived to catch up with the object of their pursuit in the manner we have described—that is to say, after he had made a halt of very nearly an hour.

The racket they made had the very natural effect of rousing the landlord, who jumped out of bed half asleep, with a vague consciousness that something very dreadful was the matter.

In a moment he had opened the little latticed casement in his bed-room, and projected his night-capped head.

His alarm grew greater when he caught sight of so many well-armed men around his door.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a quivering voice.

"Matter?" retorted Skellum. "It is a fine thing, is it not, for his Majesty's officers to be kept here like this? We want the relays of horses."

"Oh, certainly—certainly! The ostler is there, and will attend to you, gentlemen."

"He may be there," said Skellum, "but he is not here, and we cannot attract his attention."

"That's odd. He is about, I know, for I saw him open that gate about half an hour ago and let in a traveller."

"A traveller!" cried Skellum, vaguely seizing upon this item of information. "What sort of a traveller?—did you see him?"

"Yes."

"What did he look like?" was the feverish question.

"Why, a man on horseback."

"A black horse?"

"Yes."

"And did it seem to have travelled far?"

"Yes, and fast too, for it was covered with foam."

"And how long has that traveller been gone?"

"He has not gone at all. His horse must be now in the stable, for I have not heard him depart."

"And I suppose," added Skellum, scarcely able to control the agitation of his voice—"I suppose you would have been sure to hear it?"

"Certain."

This was enough.

Skellum turned to his companions.

He was so excited that his teeth chattered together, while his voice shook so that what he said was with difficulty distinguished.

"Now we have him at last," he said. "Beyond all doubt he is here. Ten to one if his mare is not lying down in the stable dead beat. For all we know he may be keeping back the ostler by main force, or it may be there is complicity in the case. However, that he will make a bold stand for his life is certain. But you must precipitate yourselves upon him so as to put an end to his existence as quickly as you can. Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

The men looked determined enough.

"If you let him slip through your fingers you will have only yourselves to blame. Now then! In the first place, down with that gate!"

The officers dismounted.

One thing to Mr. Skellum's credit is, that he never proposed anything to be done by his men that he did not share in himself.

On the present occasion he was the first to make a rush at the gate.

The others followed him, and the sudden and combined pressure of so many men caused the lock and bolts to fly in all directions.

The feeble glimmer of a light shining through the chinks of a door pointed out the whereabouts of the stables.

In this direction they all rushed without a moment's pause.

They hung themselves against the door; but it was strong, and though it shook from the violence of the attack, yet it offered an effectual impediment to their entrance.

"Hullo," cried a gruff, surly voice at this moment—"hullo there! Murder!—fire!—police! Help—help! Murder!"



[DICK TURPIN ONCE MORE MEETS WITH CAPTAIN HAWK.]

Amazed beyond expression, the officers looked round in order to find out whence this voice proceeded.

Gazing upward, they saw the upper half of a gaunt figure projected through the circular window of the loft over the stable.

It was Ned the ostler.

"Master—master!" he bawled. "Thieves—thieves! Robbers!—murder!"

"Silence, you d—d idiot!" yelled Skellum, frantic with fury. "What is the matter?"

"Well, that's a good 'un, that is."

"Why, I do believe," exclaimed the officer standing next to Skellum, "that he is fool enough to take us all for a band of robbers."

"Yes, and a mighty fine take you would be," grinned Ned.

"He cannot be so great a fool!" cried Skellum. "Hark ye, my spark," he added, in what he intended should be a

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tone of solemn warning—"hark ye! We are police officers—his Majesty's police officers—in quest of Dick Turpin, the highwayman, who, as we know very well, is in here!"

Ned shook his head.

"We have certain information."

"Then I'll prove you're wrong," answered the ostler, "for I will come down and open the door this minute; but you must give me time to put a few of my togs on."

This last speech somewhat staggered Skellum's confidence; and he would have felt more staggered still but for the fact that when he entered the yard he had seen a light burning in the stable, and which was suddenly extinguished.

The ostler did not put their patience to a very severe trial.

In less than a minute after he had spoken, they heard

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the sound produced by the withdrawal of rusty bolts.

The stable door then swung back upon its creaking hinges, and the moment that it did so the police officers rushed in.

Ned's lantern lighted up the interior of the place tolerably well—certainly well enough for the officers to perceive by one glance that the stable was empty.

"Rascal!" cried Skellum. "You have cheated us somehow!"

"Cheated you? Come, come—hands off, if you please!"

"Where is Dick Turpin?" cried Skellum, wrathfully.

"How on earth should I know?"

"Look here, sir—look here!" cried one of the officers, for they had all dispersed themselves over the stable, in order to search it thoroughly, leaving their leader to deal with Ned.

"What is it—what is it?"

"A door."

"A door?"

"Yes, sir, a door on this side of the stable. I'll have it open in a moment."

Mr. Skellum pressed forward.

The door was opened, and a rush of cool air came into the stable.

"Take care," growled Ned, "how you step outside; there's a hill there as steep as a housetop. Don't say I did not tell you."

What he said proved to be correct.

The officers looked down, and then uttered a shout.

"The he is," cried Skellum, with ungovernable excitement—"there he is—down at the bottom of the declivity!"

CHAPTER MXCVIII.

DICK TURPIN CONTINUES HIS RIDE TO YORK, AND TREATS BLACK BESS TO A BEEFSTEAK.

From this, no doubt the reader will be able to guess tolerably well what took place between Dick Turpin and the ostler. Still, we think it will be found more satisfactory if we give a brief outline of the events just as they occurred.

A very few words had served to free the highwayman from the anxiety he had first of all experienced.

"Take it easy, captain," Ned had said; "I will get you out of this scrape neatly enough, never fear."

"How shall you manage it?"

"There is another door leading out of this stable," was the reply. "Look, there it is."

"Where does it lead?"

"It is scarcely ever opened, because just over the threshold is about the steepest bit of ground you ever met with. No tiled roof was half as steep. But come, as you are ready—come this way and I will show you."

Saying, the ostler led the way towards the door where he already had occasion to make mention of.

He opened it quickly, and then Dick saw at the first glance that the description of the place was by no means an exaggerated one.

The earth from about a foot from the threshold sloped down in a manner that could only be characterised as precipitous.

"I can never ride down there," said Dick, positively.

"Perhaps not, but you can, I daresay, manage to scramble down—I have done it."

"But Black Bess?"

"You leave her to follow you, and you will find her four legs are quite as good as your two, rely upon it."

"It is my only chance," said Turpin. And just as he pronounced the words the officers flung themselves against the door with so much force that he made sure it would be driven from its hinges.

Hastily pressing a large amount of money into the faithful ostler's hand, he commenced his perilous descent without delay.

He called upon his mare to follow him.

Black Bess, of course, obeyed, and the ostler was proved to be right, for, being left to herself, she seemed to experience but little difficulty, save that she slipped now and then, for the ground was rather soft and of a clayey nature.

The ostler, having seen that things were so far well, closed and bolted the door with marvellous alacrity; then rushing up into the loft, he appeared at the window in the way we have described.

The descent occupied so much time that Dick had barely reached the level ground below when the officers discovered him. Knowing himself to be out of pistol range, and feeling tolerably certain that his foes would not venture down such a breakneck-looking place, Dick Turpin did not manifest the least hurry in any of his motions.

As leisurely as possible he resumed his position in the saddle, and then waving his hat, rode off across the low-lying meadows in the direction of the high-road.

The officers were frantic with rage.

At first they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that they had been so extremely unfortunate as to miss their prey by such a hair's breadth.

While under the influence of this vexation they watched Dick until the obscurity had entirely concealed him from their gaze.

They then turned back to the stable, their breasts glowing with rage against the ostler.

"Seize the villain!" roared Skellum. "I will make him answerable for all this! It won't need a conjurer to arrive at his share in this business. Seize him, I say, and handcuff him securely!"

It was all very well to give this order, but a slight difficulty presented itself in attempting to carry it out.

The ostler, probably sniffing out his danger, had had the prudence to decamp, and though a hasty but rigid search was made, it failed to discover him.

He had vanished entirely.

"Never mind him," said one of the officers. "If there are fresh horses here let us have them and be off as quickly as we can. It will not do for us to be worsted after coming this far."

"Certainly not," said Skellum. "Come on. We shall overtake him in a few miles. You heard what the landlord said about the condition his horse was in?"

"Yes—yes," was the universal response, though from the manner it was given the inference might have been drawn that the circumstance had only just been brought back to their memories.

"I believe he will keep his word," said one.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, ride to York."

"Pho, pho! The thing is impossible; no one ever did it or ever will."

Long before this argument was exhausted the officers were all mounted and once more in full pursuit.

For the most part the men were heartily sick of the chase, and would gladly have availed themselves of any pretext for abandoning it.

Skellum, however, was now more determined than ever; and what is more, he felt more assured than he had yet done that he should accomplish his purpose.

Still the extraordinary distance Black Bess had already performed filled him with amazement. But for the irrefragable evidence before him, he would have steadily refused to believe it.

The fresh horses galloped very freely and swiftly along the high-road, and at the pace they were going they felt sure they should before very long hear some intelligence of the highwayman.

They were quite right.

The driver of a heavy flour waggon was the first person they encountered, and from him they learned that a mounted man answering to Dick's description had passed him at a furious gallop, some time before.

This was enough, and off they went again at a speed not far short of twenty miles an hour, which at that time was considered to be very wonderful travelling indeed.

But let us return to Dick.

After mounting at the foot of the declivity, he made his way with all possible speed towards the high-road.

No words can express the gratification caused him by the fact that brave Black Bess bounded along with as much freedom and elasticity of movement as at first.

"No fear of failure on your part!" he cried. "And as for myself, I will do my best. You fail, Bess? He knew little of your mettle, or he would never have made that remark. We shall do it. There is something within me which seems to whisper: 'We shall do it.'"

The first obstacle encountered after this was an unopened toll-bar.

At this hour the keeper of it was no doubt asleep, for pikemen must slumber sometimes.

The highwayman was disinclined to lose time in attempting to arouse him, and, also with a view of testing his mare's present powers, he urged her to the leap.

Almost as much to his surprise as delight, she cleared it with ease. He had scarcely believed that after doing so much she would have accomplished it thus easily.

Once more, then, the high-road stretched out straight and clear before him.

There was no token from behind that his pursuers were anywhere near; but, for all that, Dick did not suffer his mare to abate her speed one jot.

He had another object in view besides simply distancing his pursuers.

He was resolved to make every exertion to reach York within the time he had specified.

Now that half the distance was accomplished, every milestone that he passed made him feel how he was nearing his destination.

Besides, Black Bess was going freely, and he wanted her to do so while she had the power.

The better speed she made for the next two or three hours the longer would be the rest they would be enabled to take.

In brief, let us say that forty more miles were accomplished without one symptom of flagging and fatigue.

But after that every yard seemed to tell fearfully upon the noble creature.

Yet, although her bodily powers failed her a little, her mettle was undaunted—her spirit unsubdued; and it was, Dick fancied, with a feeling of absolute annoyance that she galloped on, striving to rise superior to her muscular strength.

But it could not be.

How keen was the pang which shot through Dick's heart every time her fast-increasing distress manifested itself!

How strange it seemed, too, for up to this moment he fancied she could do anything.

"Gently, Bess," he cried—"gently! You shall have another rest. And then what shall I do? Shall I call into requisition this bottle that the ostler gave me? Shall I drug her with that, and so endue her for a time with a factitious vigour? Alas—alas! I know not—I know not!"

His voice grew sad and hushed.

But presently he spoke again.

"I have heard of such things," he said. "I have been often told that there are concoctions of such marvellous power that they will fill the veins of an exhausted charger with fresh strength—false strength, however, for it will leave them a thousand times weaker than before. Perhaps Bess would gallop on until she fell down dead beneath me. No—no, I will not try it—that is," he added, for his mare staggered slightly, "not—yet—not—yet."

Earnestly he looked around him for some place of shelter.

But none appeared.

The darkness was intense, though it was growing towards morning very fast.

Ere long, however, he felt certain they must reach a roadside inn, for they were much more closely studded along the line of highway than they are now.

Accordingly, he spoke in cheerful strains to his steed, and he was pleased to find that, in spite of her fatigue, his voice had not altogether lost its customary influence.

But suddenly a fresh idea occurred to the highwayman, and he pursued it closely.

"Let me think a little," he cried. "There is upon my mind an indistinct recollection of having heard somewhere that a raw beefsteak, or else the warm entrails of a game cock wrapped round the bit was a stimulant of no ordinary character to an exhausted horse. I will try that. There cannot come much harm of it, and something must be done, for now that I have come thus far I am determined not to fail."

Just as he had reached this point in his reflections, he perceived in the distance the object he had been longing so to behold.

Apparently it was a halting-place of no ordinary

character, for the house was large, and flanked by out-buildings of considerable extent.

To reach the inn took Dick but a few moments, and no sooner had Black Bess come to a halt than a door communicating with the stable was opened, and an ostler emerged.

"Were you expecting me," asked Dick, "that you appeared so quickly?"

"Well, no," returned the man, deliberately, and not until he had indulged himself in a long stare at the newcomers—"well, no; but I rather guess you have been pushing that horse of yours a bit harder than you ought."

"Never mind that," cried Dick. "I want a bucket of water, a quart of brandy, a wisp of straw, and about a pound of raw beefsteak."

"Anything else?" asked the man, as soon as he had recovered his breath, which seemed to have been quite taken away by Dick's orders. "Because," he added, "if there is, I can't attend to you."

"My good fellow," said Dick, "do you see this?"

As he spoke, he held up a guinea between his finger and thumb.

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, it will be yours in about a couple of minutes, and perhaps another guinea added to it, if you do what I want you with all speed."

The man stared hard for a moment, then vanished through the doorway from which he had emerged.

Dick at once alighted, and relieved his mare by loosening her trappings.

By the time he had finished, the ostler returned.

The first thing Dick took was the wisp of straw, and with this he rubbed his mare down, and afterwards bathed her with the brandy-and-water as before.

The ostler was amazed.

"Well, you are a rum'un, you are. I should like to know who you be."

Dick did not stop to reply, but went on steadily with his work.

"I don't wish to hurry you," added the ostler, "but perhaps you won't take it amiss if I tell you that I expect the mail-coach from York to arrive every minute."

"Thanks," said Dick; "that is important to me. I will be off before it comes."

"Then, let me tell you, you will have to be quick."

"How far is it from here to York?"

"A matter of fifty miles, or thereabouts."

Dick drew a long breath, as he murmured:

"A little more than two hours will serve for that."

Then, raising his voice, he inquired:

"What time is it?"

"Close on six."

"We shall do it," he cried—"I am certain we shall do it!"

"Do what?"

"Get to York by nine o'clock this morning."

"What! on that horse?"

"Yes."

"Never."

"Well, you will see."

"I tell you it will never be done. She is dead beat already."

"Don't make too sure of that. Where's the beefsteak?"

"Here."

Dick cut off a portion, and then, removing his mare's bridle, rolled the rest several times round the bit.

"There," he exclaimed, "that will be as much good to her as a feed of corn and a two hours' rest—mark my words if it is not."

The attention bestowed upon Bess had made a very great difference in her appearance—so great, that one would scarcely have taken her for the same animal.

A small quantity of brandy-and-water was in the bucket, and this, to the surprise of Dick himself, she drank greedily.

His next proceeding was to thrust the meat-encircled bit into her mouth.

She champed at it several times, and then became reconciled to the feel of this fresh substance.

"Blow me, if that isn't a rum start!" ejaculated the ostler. "I was born in a stable and reared in a hay-loft, but I never heard of such a thing as that before."

"Behold the effects of it!" exclaimed Dick, delightedly. "I can see already her eye brighten, her neck arch proudly, and her fore foot paw the ground! How far do you think she has come?"

The ostler shook his head and professed himself unable to hazard a guess.

"From London! Last night at nine o'clock—or it may have been a little later—I rode out of Drury Lane. This morning by nine o'clock I shall be at the Bowling Green at York."

While Dick thus spoke, the ostler's eyes kept getting larger and larger.

He absolutely staggered back in his amazement.

It is doubtful, too, how far he would have gone had not the wall behind him brought him to a sudden stop.

"Do you mean to say that—that—you were in London at nine o'clock last night?"

"I could produce abundant evidence of it."

"Then how have you got here in the time?"

Dick's heart gave a bound of pride as he pointed to his mare.

"One horse has never brought you," exclaimed the ostler.

"It has."

"Then you must be Old Nick himself!"

"Nothing of the sort."

"Who then?"

Before Dick could reply the sound of horses' feet became audible.

"The York mail, by jingo!" ejaculated the ostler.

"No—no!" cried Turpin, hastily. "The sound comes from London."

"So it does; and I can't hear wheels, neither."

"There are no wheels," replied Dick. "Here, take these."

He gave the ostler a couple of guineas as he spoke.

"Thank ye, sir," he cried, with more deference than he had displayed hitherto. "Although you promised me the rhino, blow me if I thought you in earnest!"

Turpin mounted his mare.

No sooner had he seated himself in the saddle than Black Bess showed herself impatient to be off.

"Wonderful!" cried the ostler, though his eyes were directed down the road while he spoke—"wonderful! But it will be the death of her."

"What will?"

"Why, to ride her fifty miles further."

"I will not believe it. Look at her now! Would you think that she had already done so much?"

The ostler was forced to admit he would not.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Look here! What gentry are these coming on so fast? One would think they were riding to York as well."

"I believe they are," answered Dick, striving to pierce the obscurity, for he was anxious to see what sort of a figure his foes cut.

He fancied there was some falling off in their numbers, but could not make sure, for it would have been sheer madness to linger longer.

"Good morning!" he cried, raising his voice. "You will see I shall be as good as my word. Remember, at nine o'clock this morning, the old Bowling Green, York."

Mr. Skellum could only reply with impotent curses.

Dick did not even hear them, for, as he spoke, he loosed the reins, and off set Black Bess at a speed that the ostler had never before seen equaled.

He was still gazing at her fast-receding form when he was aroused by hearing Skellum say:

"D—n you for a fool or a rascal! Why couldn't you stop him?"

"Stop him? What for?" cried the ostler, in a surly voice.

"Don't you know who he is?"

"No. Do you?"

"Of course I do!"

"Who is it, then?"

"Why, Dick Turpin!"

"The highwayman?"

"Yes, fool!"

"And that was Black Bess?"

The ostler was so lost in admiration and astonishment that he paid no attention to the police officer's insulting manner.

"Of course it was Black Bess! He has brought us all the way from London."

The ostler was amazed, but there was no longer room to doubt the truth of what the highwayman had told him.

While this brief conversation—if so it could be called—was going forward, the officers had dismounted, and were busily at work removing the trappings.

"Now, dolt," cried Skellum, as wrathfully as ever. "find us the horses I ordered to be provided. We must be off at once, or we shall lose him after all."

"Civility don't cost much, Mr. Officer," growled the ostler.

"It is too expensive to bestow upon you."

"Oh, is it?"

"Yes. So get us the horses."

"Get 'em yourself; d—d if I do! 'Tain't my business—I am here to look after the coach."

So saying, he thrust his hands very deeply into his breeches' pockets in a manner expressive of the utmost determination, and trudged off.

Skellum so far forgot himself as to stand still cursing fearfully.

But his men, having come so far, felt that they could not possibly afford to lose all their labour, and so searched about and soon found the animals they wanted.

They accoutred them with all speed and led them out.

As soon as he caught sight of the cattle in readiness, Mr. Skellum smothered his resentment, and was the first to mount.

As he rode away, however, he again caught sight of the ostler.

"You're a fool," he yelled, "and I'll make you know it! The reward for Dick Turpin is one thousand pounds, dead or alive, and you have allowed that comfortable sum to slip through your fingers."

"I did not want to interfere with your chance of earning it, old boy," was the imperturbable reply. "I wish you luck."

In another second inn and ostler were left behind, and the troop of police officers were once more in full pursuit of the highwayman.

That they had an immense advantage over him is certain.

The horses they now bestrode were perfectly fresh, and but for the fact that the officers were very tired, and, consequently, sat heavily in the saddle, they would have made wonderful speed.

As it was, they galloped not much under the rate of eighteen or twenty miles an hour.

The speed at which Black Bess left the inn was at first much greater than this, and Dick began to draw the most favourable conclusions from this circumstance.

But, to his grief, he was not long in making the discovery that Black Bess's powers of speed were not permanent, but fleeting.

Ere many miles had been overpassed at this furious rate he was sensible of symptoms of giving way.

Black Bess strove hard to disguise these tokens of flagging energy, but in vain.

An ordinary observer, or even an ordinary rider, would have failed to perceive these indications as soon as Dick did.

To all appearances her speed was unabated, and her capability of keeping up undiminished.

The highwayman, however, was sensible of a continual effort or kind of strain to do that which she had always before performed with perfect ease.

"Will she hold out," he asked himself, in anxious tones, "or will she fail when within a brief distance of the goal? My mind almost misgives me. Courage—courage, old lass—take it easy! There is time enough yet."

Charged by her master's words, Black Bess again for a brief space appeared somewhat like herself.

But the police officers pressed fearfully upon him.

They were gaining ground too.

Dick knew it well, for the sound of their horses' hoofs kept getting more and more distinct; and now he found, by turning his head, that he could actually see them in the rear.

The officers became terribly excited upon making this discovery that they were undoubtedly and palpably gaining upon the object of their pursuit.

Mr. Skellum was loud in his congratulations.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he cried, with an exultant chuckle. "I knew very well what the end would be." Closer and closer they came.

Less and less grew the distance intervening between themselves and the highwayman.

Dick grew anxious.

A damp, disagreeable moisture broke out all over him. The triumphant shouts of his pursuers rang in his ears like the clangour of trumpets.

Then all at once he became sensible of another sound.

Horses were coming towards him.

Were they his foes also?

He asked himself the question with no little apprehension; for if it should be so, his position would be critical in the extreme.

That they were police officers was only likely, because it was certain that some one had been sent on in advance to provide the relays of horses which at each place had been found in readiness.

But this fear soon abated.

It was not long before the highwayman's keen sense of hearing detected that mingled with the trampling of horses' hoofs was the rumbling and grinding of carriage wheels.

The discovery caused him to draw a long breath of relief.

It was now very close indeed upon daybreak.

Indeed, it was a question whether day had not yet dawned; but still, if it had, no signs of it were perceptible.

A dense fog, which showed signs of increase rather than abatement, shrouded all things, and it was through this semi-transparent medium that Dick first caught sight of the glimmer of lights.

Then a conviction as to what it was that was approaching flashed upon him.

"It is the stage-coach," he cried—"the mail-coach from York, that the ostler told me he was waiting for. How groundless was my alarm!"

At this moment there came a puff of wind from the south-west, and the mist rolled away before it as if by magic.

A soft though dim gray light overspread the scene, and all objects were revealed with comparative brilliancy.

Before the highwayman was the glorious old lumbering stage-coach, with its team of four splendid horses snorting loudly and clamping their bits, for the sagacious animals well knew that they were close to the changing house.

There was the florid-faced jolly-looking driver in front invested with all the glories of a closely-muffled great coat and gold-betrimmed felt hat.

Piled upon the roof was what seemed to be an unentangleable mass of human beings, trunks, boxes, and divers kinds of luggage.

Leaning out from behind could be seen the guard, horn in hand, preparing to give the shrill-sounding signal of their approach.

The cumbrous, heavily-laden vehicle was coming on in dashing style, and to avoid all possibility of collision with it, Dick drew to the right-hand side of the road.

But the driver, and the outside passengers as well, had caught sight of the troop of police officers in the distance, and, of course, one glance was sufficient to make them acquainted with the actual state of affairs.

Moreover, there could be no mistaking Dick Turpin for being any other than a highwayman hotly chased by officers.

Skelium saw the coach, and at the first glance saw with that readiness of thought with which he deserves to be credited, how the circumstance could not only be turned to his advantage, but also put a stop to this vexatiously long chase, of which it need scarcely be said he had for some time been heartily tired.

"Stop him!" he bawled, in such stentorian tones as would almost have justified the belief that his lungs were made of leather. "Stop him—stop him! A highwayman! Dick Turpin! A thousand pounds reward! Draw broadside across the road! That's it—that's it! Bravo—capital!"

These words which we have just set down reached with tolerable distinctness the ears of the driver of the York mail—at any rate, he understood what was wanted of him, for his actions afforded practical proof of that.

That he was a first-class coachman, the entire command he had over his horses sufficiently proved.

With what seemed like magical celerity, the vehicle was drawn broadside across the road.

So well was this done, that the hind wheels of the coach were on the brink of the ditch at one side, while the noses of the two leading horses just touched the opposite hedgerow.

The execution of this manoeuvre, however, produced a kind of panic within the coach.

At first shrill screams were heard.

Then the windows were let down and eager heads thrust forth.

Those on the one side had a full view of all that was taking place, and waited the result with no little apprehension, while the others were loud in their demands to know the cause of this sudden and unprecedented stoppage.

No one could be more surprised, however, than Dick Turpin was.

Well he might be at beholding so truly formidable a barrier so suddenly placed in his path.

What was to be done?

Naturally enough, in his indecision he pulled the rein and reduced his mare's speed.

A loud, ringing, mocking laugh of triumph at this moment reached his ears.

It came from the officers behind him.

He ground his teeth with intense vexation.

He glanced quickly to the right and left, but the hedgerows were so high and so dense, and there was so little room for a preparatory gallop, as to make him feel at once that it was hopeless to attempt flight in that direction.

"His goose is cooked," was the coach-driver's complacent remark—"we have him as safe as a rat in a trap."

"Divl a doubt of that, begorra!" cried the guard behind, and he executed so hideous a fantasia of triumph upon his horn that the passengers were fain to clap their hands over their ears.

The shouts and laughter of the officers behind redoubled, while they pushed on at the utmost speed their horses were capable of making.

At the same time they did not neglect to prepare their weapons for immediate service.

Then followed on the part of everybody a breathless silence, so much anxiety was there felt as to the occurrences of the next few moments and their results.

We must describe the exact position of affairs at this juncture.

Dick Turpin, then, was in the high-road with an expression of irresolution upon his face.

Not more than fifty yards in advance of him was the insurmountable-looking barrier composed of the mail-coach and horses.

Something like half fifty yards behind him were the officers, and every fleeting second brought them wonderfully nearer, for they were coming on at the top of their speed, while Black Bess was going little faster than at a walk.

Events approached a crisis.

What was to be done?

Dick felt that he had not much time left for making up his mind.

CHAPTER MXXCIX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A MEANS OF GETTING OUT OF HIS DIFFICULTY, AND ASTONISHES THE DRIVER OF THE YORK MAIL-COACH.

A DARK and ominous frown settled quickly upon the countenance of the highwayman.

He clenched his teeth hard, while his hands wandered towards the bolsters.

"Cursed chance!" he cried. "What shall I do? Shall I face round and fight it out? Shall I die thus with my purpose unachieved? No—no, never—never!"

And yet while he pronounced this determination he allowed Black Bess to come to a standstill.

Oddly enough, this action caused the police officers to pause.

But they had very undefined ideas as to the powers of resistance possessed by the highwayman.

This stoppage they certainly looked upon as an act of

hostility, and even Mr. Skellum thought it necessary and prudent to advance with caution.

"Cowardly knaves," muttered Turpin, with unutterable scorn, as soon as he comprehended the tactics of his adversaries, "why did they not put on a bold front and ride me down? Bess, old lass," he cried, patting her dripping neck, "shall we, who have in our time done so much to excite the wonder of others—we, who have had so many hairbreadth escapes together, and fought against such overwhelming odds—shall we, I say, shall we at last yield to such base and craven carrion as are now behind us? No—no, it shall never be! We will at least make one bold attempt at freedom."

But it was not only necessary to decide this much, but also resolve what the nature of the attempt should be.

The police officers now were coming on like men nervously themselves for some desperate encounter which they would, if possible, willingly avoid.

Still their weapons were ready in their hands, and if Dick's hesitation lasted much longer they would be within range.

It was questionable, indeed, whether they were not so already.

"There was a time when you would have thought nothing of that barrier yonder, Bess—that barrier upon which our foes appear to place so much reliance. But now, in your present exhausted state, I fear—yes, I fear to put you to it. I could never have believed such a thing as this would come to pass. I—I will try it; we can but fail, and if we do we cannot be much worse off. Yes, Bess, I will try you once more. You have now the chance of once more preserving your master's life."

We have been at some pains to make the reader perfectly acquainted with the nature of the highwayman's situation, and in consequence, some space has been occupied in so doing—this might cause an erroneous impression in the reader's mind with regard to the actual duration of time.

It must, however, be borne in mind, that all occurred very rapidly—even Dick's indecision, which we have dwelt upon at some length, could not be called other than momentary.

To those who were observing him, he seemed merely to make a pause and nothing more.

His next action, however, amazed them far more than anything which had preceded.

With extraordinary suddenness he faced round and rode a little way towards his foes, who were near enough to be able to tell by the look of his face that he had resolved upon doing something desperate.

Mr. Skellum called up all his coolness and presence of mind.

He thought he knew what Dick intended to do.

"Stand firm," he cried to his men—"stand firm, whatever you do! He thinks of dashing through us; but if you are firm he will fail in his attempt and we shall have him!"

The men immediately prepared themselves for the obeyal of this mandate.

But to their extreme rage and disappointment, Dick once more wheeled round and then galloped Black Bess towards the stage-coach.

He touched her with his spur, and she gave a bound forward as though completely maddened.

"Bravo—bravo, old lass!" he cried; and his voice rang out clear and sharp in the morning air. "Bravo—try your best—try your best! Once more your master's life depends alone upon your powers!"

Black Bess heard her master's voice, and if she did not comprehend the actual words she well enough understood the tone.

It was the same as he had made use of many a time before when he required to avail himself of her extraordinary powers.

She saw the obstacle before her, and seemed to gather up all her energies for the terrific leap.

The driver of the stage-coach saw him coming on and uttered loud shouts.

"Stop—stop! Curse the fellow—what is he after? What does he mean to do?—is he going to ride into my leaders? Woe, woe, there—stop, I say—are you mad?"

Dick Turpin paid not the least attention to these words.

Keeping to one side of the way, he rode Black Bess directly towards the two "leaders," as the driver called

them, and which he had so fondly believed would prove an impassable barrier.

The two horses were standing close together, and though the feat of leaping over them was one which very few would have thought or cared about attempting, yet Dick Turpin felt assured that it was one which his mare would have accomplished easily had she been in her ordinary condition.

But after the distance she had travelled, Dick felt no slight misgivings as he rode her towards it.

The passengers on the coach looked much alarmed.

The horses, too, that were harnessed to the unwieldy vehicle, grew restive, so that the driver's care was required in attending to them.

The officers, recovering from their first panic, quickly commenced pursuit, for they did not believe it possible for any horse to clear such an obstacle.

But as she drew nearer, Black Bess's speed wonderfully increased.

"Up—up!" shouted her rider at a certain moment; and just as he pronounced the word she rose up in the air and cleared the pair of horses bravely, having apparently a foot or so to spare.

The coachman dropped his whip in astonishment, and as it happened to fall on the backs of his two horses it increased their restiveness in no slight degree.

Then the guard was so flustered that he discharged his blunderbuss in the air, thereby adding tenfold to the panic of the passengers, as well as startling the already half-frightened and consequently scarcely manageable horses.

What the guard meant to do with the blunderbuss, or why he had taken it from its receptacle, are things known only to himself.

It is possible, however, that he had some vague idea that he would be able to use it against the highwayman.

As it was, it was a mercy no one was hurt.

Dick Turpin, finding himself clear, gave vent to a loud ringing cheer, so great was the exultation at his heart.

He did not pause to look behind him, but resolved to make the most he could of the time thus gained.

He knew a little delay must take place before his foes could get fairly on his track again, and it was wise of him under present circumstances to get as good a start as he could.

But as no means anticipated such a long delay as actually took place, and which at length induced him to look behind him and see whether his pursuers had not at last abandoned the chase.

At the first glance he burst out laughing at what he beheld.

It will take us a moment or two to explain what he beheld.

The officers, then, with Mr. Skellum at their head, reached the coach not much after Dick had taken the leap.

Of course, none of them felt inclined to follow his example, but they were most anxious that the horses should be immediately turned out of their way.

But this, owing to the restiveness of the animals, proved no easy matter.

The act of a horse and rider passing over them in such a fashion they could not at all comprehend, and the "two wheelers," or horses next to the coach, happened to catch sight of the flying horseman, and in their terror naturally recoiled.

Now, had not the driver dropped his whip, he could doubtless have put an end to this retrogressive movement; as it was, he had lost his powers, and the horses continued to back most obstinately.

The passengers began to scream and shout in mingled alarm and expostulation.

The hind wheels of the coach had, by the coachman's clever manoeuvre, been placed about a foot from the brink of a very wide and deep ditch.

As the horses kept backing it follows that before anything could be done the hind wheels of the vehicle ran down into the ditch, and with so much force and suddenness as to cause the coach to give such a violent lurch as to make all think its overthrow inevitable.

After much swaying to and fro, the cumbrous machine righted itself.

But their terror caused the fore horses to make quite a different movement.

With alarm increased rather than abated, they turned very short and started forward.

In vain the coachman tugged at the reins with all his might.

In vain he cried out "Woa!"

The horses were insensible to both bit and voice.

The consequence is evident.

The coach was drawn all to one side, and after a general quiver, went over with a hideous crash.

It was at this moment that Dick happened to look behind him.

The horses were kicking and floundering in inextricable confusion, and the harness, as it gave way in various places, became more and more entangled.

Never was heard such screaming before.

The chorus was terrific.

The guard had, most unluckily for himself, been flung into a holly bush, where he stuck fast.

His yells were alarming to listen to, and not a little contributed to the general terror of the passengers.

The pain he endured in the tender parts of his anatomy would not allow him to remain still—human endurance could not bear it.

But the misfortune was that the more he floundered about in his insane and ineffectual efforts to extricate himself, the more was he tormented with the thousand prickles of the holly bush.

It was a case, however, when everybody's first and chief attention was given to number one, and all the travellers had too much to do in looking after themselves even to think about making any effort for his liberation.

Those who had occupied outside seats, of course, experienced severe contusions; and as they one by one picked themselves up and removed to a little distance, they presented truly a pitiable spectacle.

Not a few had fallen head first into the ditch, which happened to be filled almost brim full of stagnant water, overgrown with a kind of green disagreeable-looking vegetation.

It is true that the foul water and the sticky dirt which formed the bed of the ditch saved them from sustaining any severe injury, but then, when they scrambled out, they were in such a woful pickle that made them think that anything much worse could not have well befallen them.

Those inside did not escape, for the overturnment of the vehicle bumped them altogether in a terrible manner.

Most desperate were the efforts made to emerge from their place of prisonage; but they had but little result, for the only means of exit was by crawling through the coach window which was now turned upwards to the sky.

The police officers were too much intent upon the capture of the highwayman, who had given them so much trouble, to think of aiding the passengers in any way, and as soon as they could extricate themselves from the scene of confusion they did so.

The driver bawled to them for assistance, and indeed he considered that he was fully entitled to their services.

The guard alternately beseeched and commanded them to release him from the holly.

But they disregarded the words of both, and rode away amid a storm of yells and curses from the whole assemblage.

The position of the driver was by no means an enviable one, as he quickly found.

At first he had greatly congratulated himself upon the fact that he had reached the ground almost without sustaining a bruise, for a stout passenger, who had sat on the box beside him, had fallen undermost.

But the coachman was not long before he was made aware that he was not destined to get off quite easily.

The passengers having partially recovered themselves, broke out into violent language, which was not at all surprising.

Still less so was the fact that they ardently desired to be revenged upon some one.

By common consent, that some one pitched upon was the driver, whom they considered to be the source of all their troubles.

They came up to him with a menacing air, and formed round him in a dense throng.

"You villain!" cried one, shaking his clenched fist. "What do you mean by overturning the coach in this fashion, and putting all our lives in danger?"

"Ay—what do you mean by it?" iterated the rest, closing closer round him.

The coachman turned, as though he would have fled; but he only felt himself confronted by others, if possible, more menacing.

"I've a d—d good mind to horsewhip the vagabond from here to the next inn!" exclaimed one, who had picked up the article he mentioned.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen," he cried, in an expostulating tone, "don't blame me. How the devil could I help it?"

"Blame you!—who else must we blame?"

"What business had you to interfere with highwaymen?"

"None at all!" yelled the guard, who at that moment was pierced by a larger and stronger thorn than any he had hitherto experienced. "Pitch into him—give it him hot! I only wish I had the chance. Oh, d—n it!"

Another thorn calmed forth this last ejaculation.

The passengers scarcely needed any bidding in the matter.

They were, it is true, seeking for some pretext to attack the driver, and the guard's word proved sufficient.

To the intense satisfaction of the last-named functionary the passengers, including one or two representatives of the so-called softer sex, made a violent onslaught upon the driver, who vainly bellowed for mercy, and declared that the fault was none of his, but that he should be the greatest sufferer, because his master would expect him to repair the coach, and if he failed to do so to send him to prison.

To this the only reply he got was, that it served him well right, and hoped it would be a warning to him to mind his own business another time.

The coachman felt himself to be a much-injured individual, for he felt morally certain that if his manoeuvre had caused the capture of the highwayman he would then have received as much applause as he now had abuse.

But such is the world.

The travellers only ceased their attack when compelled to do so, and finally trudged off towards the inn, whither those of their more peaceable companions had already gone.

The driver and the guard were left alone in their glory masters of the field, the former unable to rise in consequence of the severe punishment he had received, and the latter now hopelessly embedded in the holly bush.

Here we will leave them, for other and more stirring events call for our attention.

Long before the occurrence of the last incident we have described the police officers had got out of sight and hearing.

Having kept up the chase so long with so little result, it may seem strange to say that the weary, worn-out officers had now really greater hopes of success than they had yet entertained.

The reason of this was that daylight was fast coming on, and consequently they would be able to see well about them.

Moreover, there would be a greater number of people abroad, and it might be that some of them, noticing the suspicious appearance of the hard-pressed highwayman, would take upon themselves the responsibility of detaining him.

Once or twice Mr. Skellum and his adherents fancied they could hear the faint clatter of hoofs a long way in advance, but they could not satisfy themselves upon the point.

As before, however, there was no difficulty in gaining intelligence on the subject of their pursuit.

Every one they met could tell them something of the highwayman, and all agreed that he could not be far off, and that his horse appeared to be much exhausted.

Such accounts as these, coupled with the approach of day, might well make the police officers strongly of opinion that their arduous task was drawing to a close.

Still, in spite of all their efforts, they were not success-

ful in catching sight of Dick, although they strained their eyes unceasingly in the belief that the next instant must serve to bring him before their anxious gaze.

Meanwhile, Dick Turpin continued for a long time at a hard gallop, which he knew very well Black Bess kept up with difficulty; but he was conscious he could not permit her to relax her efforts.

The adventure with the coach had given a fresh turn to his thoughts, because the excitement was so unexpected.

The ease, too, with which Black Bess had achieved her tremendous leap filled him with enthusiasm, and he drew from it the most favourable auguries of future success.

"I did not give you credit for half so much, old girl!" he cried. "On—on! Do not flag now! Keep up, brave lass! Do not fail now that so much has been accomplished—now that the end is almost in view! But why do I talk of failure? I will banish the thought. Black Bess, we *must* succeed! The feat performed, it will ever afterwards be spoken of with wonder. We shall never be forgotten—never while horses are made use of. On, Bess—on! Courage—courage! We are doing this for fame!"

The gallant mare responded nobly to the enthusiastic tones of her rider's voice.

But for all that, a strain could be detected; and, though the words we have just set down came from the highwayman's lips, yet in his heart there was a whisper of misgiving and of doubt.

It was, indeed, more with the hope of drowning these inward suggestions that he spoke up so loudly.

Suddenly, he perceived before him a wide river.

The name of it he knew not; but he saw the stream was wide, and that there was no bridge to connect its banks, probably on account of its great width we have spoken of.

Here was an obstacle indeed, and he wondered greatly how it was to be surmounted.

While debating this point, he slackened speed and looked well about him.

The day might now be said fairly to have begun; but the great sheet of water was covered by a shifting mass of vapour, which interfered greatly with the vision.

At last the very bank was reached, and then Dick came to a dead stop.

"There must be a ferry-boat belonging to this place; and yet where is it? Ah!" he exclaimed, as the rolling mist partly cleared away and enabled him to see the opposite bank with greater plainness, "there it is! All will now be well."

As he spoke, he placed his hands before his mouth, and gave utterance to a prolonged shout.

His voice floated across the water and was heard, for he perceived a figure make an answering signal, and directly afterwards he distinguished the faint tones of a distant voice.

"That is well," he said. "You will be able to have a brief rest now, old girl. You shall be rid of my weight, too. While the ferry-boat is coming you will have a chance of recovering your wind."

The overtaxed animal seemed very grateful for this brief respite from exertion, and turned her out-starting, glassy eyes upon her rider with an expression so truly wistful that he was compelled to turn away.

As he did so, his ears caught a faint sound.

He started and listened again, for he fancied his acute sense of hearing had deceived him.

"So close!" he ejaculated, a moment after. "I was not prepared for this. How much like bloodhounds they keep upon the trail! I—I begin to fear that they will hunt us down, after all.

"No, no—I won't think that!" he added, as though ashamed of his fears—"I won't think that—at least, not yet."

The sound now was more distinct.

There could be no doubt as to its character.

The officers were coming, and every moment now Dick expected would bring them within sight.

He cast an anxious glance across the water.

The huge, lumbering ferry-boat was not more than half across, for it seemed to encounter much opposition from the tide.

"It is all over," said Dick, as he caught the first glimpse of his pursuers in the distance. "By the time

the boat reaches the shore they will be here—perhaps before it. Come, Bess," he added, "I would fain have spared you if I could, but there is no help for it—we must swim across."

In her wearied state, Dick reasonably enough dreaded the imposition of this task.

But he was governed by stern, inflexible necessity.

Either he would have to remain where he was until his foes arrived, or else take to the water.

Full of risk as it was, of course the highwayman chose the latter course.

Taking the rein over his arm, he led his mare into the water, and, as soon as he was deep enough, he began to swim.

She followed his example willingly enough.

Her master knew she had good swimming capabilities, and he was surprised to see what good speed she made.

The ferryman was so astonished at beholding this proceeding that for a moment he forgot it was necessary for him to bestow perpetual care upon his boat.

Being left for this moment, it veered round and drifted off with the current, which was particularly strong, but which, to Dick's advantage, set in for the shore he wished to reach, thus materially diminishing the exertion which his steed and himself were compelled to make.

It had been Dick's hope to get the ferry-boat over to the other side, and bribe the man to keep it there, so as to detain his foes. As things turned out, however, there seemed every probability that they would be able to avail themselves of it much sooner than was ordinary.

Dick thought he might yet achieve his object, and shouted to the man to put back.

But his words were either unheard or disregarded.

Dick was now in mid-stream, and the ferry-boat not much more.

This was the moment when the officers, panting and breathless with the extra efforts they had been making, reached the river's bank.

Scarce one of them had breath enough to hail the ferryman; but he saw them, and comprehended their motions.

"Quick—quick!" cried Skellum. "Come on—come on! Five pounds if you are quick! Come—come on, or I'll be d—d if the man and horse won't reach the other side first!"

Although the water made a strange gurgling in his ears, yet Dick could just hear the words uttered by his foe.

It was, therefore, only reasonable to suppose that they were heard also by the ferryman, who was now out of Turpin's sight.

Black Bess swam bravely, though her master listened with some apprehension to her laborious snorting.

As for Dick himself, a better swimmer need not be, and yet he felt anxious to reach the shore, for he was conscious that he was not in his proper element.

He was able to make capital progress, for the current seemed to increase in strength, while it certainly carried him in the direction of the shore he wished to reach.

The ferryman, on the contrary, made very little motion.

The clumsy boat was much too large to be under the management of one man only, and the current was on this morning unusually strong.

Mr. Skellum and his companions were in a state which we can only describe as being one of absolute frenzy.

They ran up and down, shouted, waved their arms, discharged their pistols over the water, and committed a hundred other extravagant actions.

It was, indeed, galling to think that after all their late exertions which had brought them so close to the object of their pursuit, that they should thus be compelled to remain in a state of absolute inaction.

The ferryman at first seemed somewhat disinclined to approach or have anything to do with such violent individuals, but the promise of a large reward and the declaration that they were police officers in pursuit of a notorious criminal, removed his scruples and abated his fears.

So soon as ever the clumsy bark was anywhere near, several of the officers rushed unbidden into the water, and assisted to drag it to the bank.

No sooner did it grate upon the sand than there was a



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universal and tremendous rush on the part of the police officers to obtain seats in it.

This haste was so great as for a time to defeat its own object.

The ferryman was in momentary dread of witnessing the capsizing of his boat.

At last, however, his horses and men were safely got on board, and the lumbering vessel pushed off.

Its freight was unusually heavy, and its progress slow on that very account.

But the current soon began to make its influence felt.

Mr. Skellum turned to look at Dick, from whom his eyes had for a brief space been removed.

"Death and the devil!" he cried. "He has reached the shore! Curse his impudence! That shout was meant as defiance. Now he is in the saddle; and now he is off again like the wind! Row, you villain! Are we to have

all our trouble thrown away through you? Quick—quick!"

It was quite a relief for Skellum and his officers to find some one they could blame, for they had a great deal of angry feeling stored up in their breasts.

Their rage was vain, for the rate of speed made by the boat could not be accelerated.

Finally, to the great relief of all, the opposite bank of the river was reached.

They disembarked with much precipitation. No sooner had the promised gratuity been given to the ferryman than they clambered to their saddles.

Mr. Skellum seated himself somewhat gingerly, for though a good horseman, yet he could not help feeling the effects of so long a ride.

Great as was their expedition, yet when they started not only was Dick out of sight but out of hearing.

"Never mind," said Skellum, with an undaunted voice, "we cannot give in now we have come so far! Push on! This is only a little bit of a spurt, and will soon be over! It is impossible that his mare can hold out much longer."

"It is wonderful that she has come so far," remarked one of the officers.

"Most wonderful!" assented Skellum. "I would never have believed that a horse possessed so much endurance! I am not an actual witness of it."

"It seems like witchcraft," said another.

"It does! But the end must certainly be near."

"What a thousand pities it is," cried the officer who had first spoken, "that such a magnificent creature should be in the hands of this fellow!"

"I am truly sorry," said Skellum; "she deserves a better fate. I know well enough what will be the end—he will contrive to ride her until she falls down dead beneath him—that will be her end; and we shall witness it before very long."

No more was said.

The officers were not exactly the sort of men to waste sentiment about anything.

Indeed, it is in no slight degree surprising that Black Bess should have touched them so much as she did.

The prospect of seeing her dead, and consequently her rider at their mercy, served, however, to change entirely the current of their thoughts.

Besides, while riding as they were, it was by no means an easy matter to keep up anything resembling a continued conversation.

After this, they rode on in silence.

At frequent intervals Skellum would listen intently, in the hope of hearing something of the fugitive.

Suddenly, after going some miles, he uttered an exclamation.

Then, immediately afterwards, he cried out, in a loud voice, that had a good deal of exultation in its tones:

"I can hear him—I can hear him! I am certain of it! Listen—listen, all of you! We are gaining on him! Whip and spur—whip and spur, I say! The end is close at hand!"

The officers all listened, and they were able to distinguish the distant clatter of a horse's hoofs.

All at once, Skellum cried out:

"He has stopped—he has stopped! Something has happened! Perhaps he is thrown. At any rate, something is the matter. Push on! Hurrah! we have him now, at last!"

CHAPTER XC.

DICK TURPIN TRIES THE EFFECTS OF THE OSTLER'S POTION UPON BLACK BESS.

The words just uttered by Mr. Skellum were decidedly premature.

But the reader, no doubt, is anxious to know whether Dick Turpin had been compelled to come to a halt or not.

It is hardly necessary to say that Dick reached the shore in safety.

As soon as he felt the water was shallow enough, he waded through, holding Black Bess by the bridle.

Then, shaking himself as well as he was able, so as to rid himself of as much water as he could, he uttered that shout about the character of which Mr. Skellum had made no mistake, and immediately afterwards vaulted into the saddle.

He was not without considerable misgiving, however, his dread being that swimming so far had done much towards exhausting his mare.

To his joy, however, he quickly found this to be an entire mistake.

So far from showing fatigue, it seemed as though the cold water had had a powerful reactionary effect.

Her sinews seemed braced, and her veins to be filled with fresh vigour.

Her respiration, too, was neither so hurried nor so laboured as it had been.

From all this Dick drew the most favourable auguries.

"We shall do it, Bess, my lass," he ejaculated, patting her tenderly—"we shall do it—I am sure we shall! There must be no more flagging. You are not riding to York,

old girl, but you are riding to fame; and the story of how you travelled will be recounted as long as horses remain beasts of burden. There will never be one to surpass you. On—on! Forward and onward yet!"

Black Bess responded bravely to her master's words; and to have seen her at this moment no one would have given credence to the fact that she had travelled so many miles in so short a time.

There was a freedom about all her movements and elasticity in her joints which delighted her rider beyond measure.

It actually seemed as though the swim across the river, much as he had dreaded it, was the most favourable circumstance that could occur.

Black Bess appeared as much refreshed by the exertion as she would have been had she enjoyed a good rest and partaken of a good feed of corn.

Dick's joy increased.

In his delight and enthusiasm, he waved his arms and shouted aloud in a manner that greatly excited the wonderment of the few travellers he happened to meet with at that early hour.

Black Bess was once more going at that wonderful stretching gallop of hers which no steed could come near.

But Dick's enthusiasm was more the effects of a wild excitement than a genuine feeling.

Although his lips gave utterance to the expressions we have recorded, yet his heart smote him severely.

He knew that the achievement of riding from London to York in the short space of twelve hours, even if accomplished, would be at the price of his mare's life.

He knew it, though with a strange wilfulness he closed his eyes to it, and, so far from abandoning his purpose, did all he could to urge her to still more exertion.

The time was drawing short, and many miles had yet to be accomplished.

Not that he despaired or even doubted success for a single moment, but he was impatient now that the ride should be over.

Away, then, they flew, at a speed which by an ordinary rider would have been considered dangerous in the extreme.

Instead of thinking so, Dick kept endeavouring to make his mare go faster still.

Suddenly, however, in the midst of her career, she stumbled.

Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses.

She had never in her life done so before.

There could be no doubt about it now, however, for she instantly fell dead lame.

Dick's heart stood still.

Such a panic took possession of him that he was unconscious of everything.

Whether he checked the rein or whether his mare had stopped of her own accord he knew not.

But all at once he awoke to the consciousness that she was standing still.

And yet consciousness did not entirely return to him.

The occurrence of the accident at this particular juncture seemed to have a paralysing effect upon him.

For some seconds he remained in the saddle as though changed to stone.

Black Bess panted terribly.

Every time her lungs expanded it seemed as though her swelling sides must burst the saddle girths.

Now that she had stopped, the perspiration rose above her like a cloud of vapour, while heavy drops fell from her flanks and reached the ground with a sullen dash.

What was to be done?

As yet, Dick had scarcely asked himself this question.

Was this to be the end?

After accomplishing so much—after all his felicitations and anticipations—was this to be the ultimate result?

The blood slowly forced itself through his veins like ice.

Then, faintly but yet distinctly, there came upon his ears a distant ringing sound.

An ordinary ear would perhaps have failed to dis-

guish it; but to the highwayman's educated faculties it was only too audible.

The sound told of the rapid coming of his pursuers.

And yet he sat listening, like one either stupefied or else charmed from moving.

Nearer, clearer came the sound.

There was no doubt about its character.

Ere long they would be in sight.

But Dick seemed now utterly abandoned to despair.

He did not seem to care what had occurred now that his scheme had been thus rudely put an end to.

With such a sigh as one might suppose would come from the breast of one in whose heart hope had been forever annihilated, Dick left the saddle.

Dread was at his heart—a fiery mist about his eyes and brain.

What caused the lameness?

With a coolness and a manner that looked like entire indifference, he stooped to ascertain.

He was indifferent.

What did the cause of lameness matter so that the lameness itself existed?

Black Bess was lame, and being so, it was out of all question that she would be able to perform the task he had assigned to her.

He proceeded to make his examination with as much calmness as a man who had abundance of leisure.

But, in point of fact, little more than a glance was required to make him acquainted with the nature of the mischief.

In her desperate attempt to keep up her gallop she had what is technically called overreached.

That is, the sharp iron toe upon the hind shoe had struck against the heel of her fore-foot, inflicting an ugly-looking cut, from which the blood flowed profusely.

It was the sudden pain thus caused that had made Bess lame; and had her rider pushed her on instead of pulling up immediately on making the discovery, the symptoms would have disappeared very speedily.

When Turpin saw that no more mischief had been done than this, he drew a long heartfelt sigh of relief, and once more suffered himself to be buoyed up by hope.

He tore a long slip off his neckcloth and used this as a bandage.

Then, afterwards, by a speedy yet thorough examination satisfied himself that nothing else was amiss.

Yet, rapid as he was, the reader will not require to be told that several precious moments had been consumed.

At any rate, the period had been sufficient to enable his indefatigable pursuers to get into sight.

They saw him, for the morning now was bright and clear—even the warmth of the sun's rays could be felt.

They were not a little surprised to see Tarpin dismounted and standing near his mare.

But they very soon arrived at the conclusion that Black Bess had met with an accident of some kind or other; and as this could not but prove an advantage to them, they pushed on as fast as an unceasing application of the whip and spur would urge them.

Dick, having brought his operations to a conclusion, looked up and saw them.

A bitter smile curled his lips.

"They are all wolves upon the track of blood, or sharks after some death-doomed wretch on board a vessel. They will hunt me to the last gasp. Never mind," he concluded, "I can defy them yet. I know Bess is all right now."

He mounted as he spoke; but how different was his mode of doing so to that which he ordinarily adopted.

It was his wont to place one hand upon the pommel, and then to spring with one bound into his seat.

Now, however, the way in which he climbed into the saddle spoke volumes as to the amount of his fatigue; and by his appearance at this moment it would seem as though he would be to the full as much exhausted as his mare upon the conclusion of the journey.

Black Bess had her ears inclined backwards, as though listening to the coming of her master's foes.

Then, no sooner did she feel him seated, than she started off of her own accord.

She went lame at first, but that was only stiffness, and it vanished quickly.

The efforts that she now made cannot be spoken of by any other term than that of superhuman.

Dick did nothing save speak encouragingly now and then.

It was hard, however, to think otherwise than that Black Bess, being fully sensible of the proximity of Dick's foes, was doing her best to increase the distance between them with the least possible delay.

As for the highwayman himself, he had no doubts whatever upon the subject, and his enthusiasm rose to its highest pitch when, on looking back after the lapse of a short interval, he saw that not only had she tried, but had succeeded.

The police officers soon found that they were even now unable to compete with her, and their blown horses had by this time become so accustomed to a brutal and continuous use of whip and spur as to be now heedless and insensible of both.

Do what they could, the officers were unable to increase the speed of their overridden beasts—indeed, they soon discovered that each moment reduced the rate most materially.

Nevertheless, Mr. Skellum did not despair.

Fresh horses were waiting for him on the road, and upon them he relied for making up lost ground.

Minute after minute thus flew by, until at last Dick again found himself upon the high-road alone—both out of sight and out of hearing of his enemies.

The reader, of course, will not be surprised to learn that Black Bess suffered fearfully.

Her terrible and palpable distress sent a pang through her master's heart, but it did not incline him to forget his purpose.

If such a thing could be possible, his determination was stronger than it had yet been.

His goal now he looked upon as being almost within sight.

The race was all but won.

It would have been strange indeed had he relented now.

But he did pull in, for there was time enough yet before him for the accomplishment of his purpose within the bounds he had set himself, and his foes, he thought, were far enough behind to render this course prudent.

Another thing that influenced him was, that a steepish bit of road lay in advance, and up this, at all hazards, he resolved that she should walk.

Her distress now appeared to be greater than ever; and had anyone seen her in her present state they would have boldly enough declared that it would be utterly impossible for her to keep on for many miles longer.

Dick almost began to think so himself.

Her condition wrung a groan from his heart.

His hand sought his waistcoat pocket.

He was thinking about the bottle that had been given him by the ostler.

Although he had no reason to doubt its efficacy, and although one would think it could never be more wanted than at the present moment, yet he felt an invincible reluctance to trying its powers.

Thoughtfully, and thus debating with himself, he rode up the hill.

On the right-hand were some very substantial-looking ricks of hay and straw, and a little way beyond a picturesque farm-house, from the chimneys of which thin wreaths of blue smoke were curling.

Dick looked upon these things with a listless eye, being, indeed, scarcely conscious that he was observing them.

As Black Bess toiled on he was wondering whether he should administer the potion or not.

A slight circumstance caused him to resolve not to do so, and also induced him to make use of another expedient.

Round the ricks of which we have made mention several fowls were strutting, cackling, and working busily.

No sooner did Dick notice them, than he gave a slight start, and muttered:

"I wonder, now, whether there is any truth in it? I am certain I have heard that the warm entrails of a gamecock wrapped round the bit will give unusual vigour to a flagging steed. Why should I doubt it? The beef-steak far exceeded all my expectations; and why should not this be as efficacious? At any rate, I will try; the

experiment can do no harm, and I shall be better reconciled to the use of the potion when I know it is absolutely my last resource."

While speaking these words Dick drew from his pocket a small pistol.

He gave just one glance at it to see that it was in readiness for use, and then, pointing it steadily, pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, a report, and a wreath of blue smoke.

When the latter had died away Dick saw the cock rolling on the ground in the agonies of death.

To alight from his steed, spring over the low boundary hedge, and to seize the struggling bird, took the highwayman but a moment.

A knife then put a speedy termination to his existence, and also supplied Turpin with what he wanted.

It was no very easy matter to enwrap the bit with such a mass, but he succeeded, and regained the saddle.

Black Bess was made to ascend the hill at a walk, and on reaching the summit Dick was rejoiced to see that the ground had a downward tendency as far as his eye could reach.

This was greatly in his favour.

There certainly was some strange virtue in the experiment just tried, for Black Bess appeared to be endowed with a new lease of life.

Once again she galloped freely along the high-road; and though it was not like her old rate of travelling, yet she got over the ground exceedingly well, and, what was much more important, with an evident abatement of her distress.

Whether this new-found vigour would endure was a question he hardly dared to think about. It was sufficient to know that all was well in the present.

He looked behind him many times, for he fully expected to catch sight of his pursuers.

For a long time the country was open, and the summit of the hill near the farm-house was, consequently, clearly visible.

But presently the aspect changed.

The high-road was fringed by thick-growing trees, and, besides, took a somewhat serpentine direction, so that it was now impossible for the officers to catch sight of Dick unless they got very close in his rear indeed.

Every milestone that was now passed increased the new-found hope in the highwayman's breast.

The road was getting more occupied with people, who seemed in no ordinary degree astonished at beholding our hero and Black Bess.

Suddenly, Dick's ears were assailed with a fresh sound.

It was that caused by a single horseman riding at a tremendous rate towards him.

Of this horseman Dick could not catch a glimpse in consequence of the sibilous character of the roadway.

But he could hear him distinctly enough.

The gallop, he could tell, was a long stretching one, and yet the advancing horse trod with extraordinary lightness.

"That is no ordinary animal," muttered Turpin, as he inclined a little more to the left-hand side of the road. "Ah!" he added, with a heavy sigh, "would that you, my bonny Black Bess, were only capable of covering the ground in such a style. There was a time when nothing could surpass you; but I sadly fear that time has gone by never—never to come again."

A profound fit of dejection came over him at this moment.

So profound that he forgot all about the advancing rider, in whose steed he had begun to feel so deep an interest.

He was only aroused from this fit of abstraction by seeing the stranger come at full swing round a bend in the road, and not very far ahead.

What first attracted Turpin's attention was that the approaching steed was like Black Bess: of a jetty blackness.

The rider, too, was not altogether unlike Dick himself, save that he had a much more youthful air, and that he was of a much more slender make.

He came on with such swiftness, however, that there was no opportunity of observing him very closely, or his steed either.

Yet as he fitted past, Dick felt convinced that the rider's

appearance was very familiar to him—that he had indeed seen him somewhere or other.

The stranger, too, must evidently have been struck with the same idea, for directly he had gone by he reined-in his horse, and having brought him to a standstill, turned round and rode towards our hero.

Hearing some one approach, Dick looked behind, and this time recognised the rider.

"As I live," he ejaculated, "that must be Captain Hawk! What on earth can have brought him into this part of the country?"

"I think I am under no mistake," said Captain Hawk, for it was indeed he—"you are—"

"Dick Turpin, at your service."

"I thought so. Give me your hand. I am heartily glad to see you."

There could be no doubting Captain Hawk's sincerity.

His fine open countenance showed that what he had said had come from his heart.

Dick could not put on an appearance of much gaiety, but nevertheless he pressed Captain Hawk's proffered hand very warmly, for at this juncture it gave Dick a peculiar thrill of emotion to find that he had a friend.

Captain Hawk's eyes, however, at once fixed themselves upon Black Bess, and at the same time his face assumed an expression which we can only term as one of incredulous amazement.

"Good Heavens," he ejaculated, "that is never your famous mare?"

Dick bowed gravely.

"Then what on earth have you been doing with her to change so greatly? Even with you on her back I scarcely knew her. I ask again, what have you done to her?"

"Ridden her from London."

"From London!" repeated the captain, with a puzzled air. "But I don't see that accounts for it. I have ridden Satan here from London, and yet I think he never was in better trim in his life."

"But how long were you about it?"

"How long?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hardly know. I was in no hurry. I simply journeyed from place to place."

"Precisely so," said Turpin, with a smile, while his heart swelled with triumph: "but will you believe me it I tell you how long I have been coming thus far on the road to York?"

"Certainly. Why should I doubt your word?"

"Because what I am going to tell you will sound so incredible."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the captain, eagerly, for he was always much interested in everything relating to Black Bess, for the reason that he looked upon her as the only existing rival to his own splendid steed—"indeed! Let me hear it—I am all impatience."

"Well," said Dick Turpin, with great deliberation, and looking full into the face of Captain Hawk while he spoke, "I don't happen to know what the precise hour may be now—"

"Stay a moment. I will let you know precisely. I have a splendid timekeeper here."

While speaking, Captain Hawk drew from his pocket a magnificent gold repeater, the case of which was absolutely encrusted with diamonds and precious stones.

It must have been worth a small fortune.

But the light-hearted highwayman handled it as though it were the most "careless trifle" in the world.

"It is now," he said, "precisely five minutes to seven."

"Good; then I have five minutes that I can stay and chat with you, then I must be off."

"Yes, but you have not told me how long."

"Then listen."

"I am listening with the utmost eagerness."

"Last night, then, at nine o'clock, or it may, perhaps, have been a few moments later, I was in Drury Lane, so that I have managed to come thus far in ten hours less five minutes."

Captain Hawk sat on his horse and looked at Dick with as much wonderment as probably he would have done had he been assured that he was at that moment in the moon instead of upon the earth.

Dick Turpin enjoyed his astonishment immensely.

"You don't seem to believe me altogether," he said, at length, perceiving that the captain did not speak.

"You take my breath away."

"I thought it would."

"But do you mean to tell me in sober earnest that you have ridden your mare this immense distance in the space of time you mention?"

"I will swear to it if you like; but I think her condition ought to give some weight to my testimony."

"Well, well, you amaze me more than I can express. Even now I am half wondering whether I can have heard aright."

"I am not surprised at that."

"Had anyone else told me this," he continued, "I should have steadfastly refused belief. I should not have hesitated to call it a most monstrous invention."

"That does not surprise me. No doubt there will be many who will refuse to believe that such a feat has been performed. But fortunately there is abundance of proof in existence—the best of proof, I may say. But I must not linger," he added, perceiving that the captain had not yet recovered from his surprise. "I have no time to spare, for I intend to be at the Bowling Green, at York, by the time the clock in the old minster peals forth the hour of nine."

"You will hardly do it, I fear," was the earnest reply.

"Still, I will not render your undertaking any more difficult by detaining you here, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"If you would allow me to ride on a little way by your side I should look upon it as a great favour; I am loth to part with you without exchanging a few words. My way is any way if you will let me come."

To have refused this request would have been churlish to a degree, so Dick at once granted it.

Captain Hawk looked delighted.

"I am impatient," he said, as he put his splendid horse in motion—"most impatient to know what can have induced you to undertake so long a ride. You must have had some powerful reason for it, for—will you excuse me if I speak my thoughts?"

"Certainly. What would you say? Do not hesitate to speak freely."

"Well, then, I think your motive must have been powerful in the extreme, for I am perfectly certain that after this Black Bess will never be again what she has been. You must know it too; and I am at a loss to think why you are willing to sacrifice her."

Captain Hawk's words caused Dick Turpin so much emotion that for a moment or two he could not speak.

Captain Hawk rode beside him in silence, with his eyes fixed upon his countenance.

By a sudden effort Turpin cleared his voice, and then, in sad tones, he said:

"You are right, Black Bess will never, never be again what she has been."

"I regret it," answered Hawk, "for more reasons than one. I have heard much about her, and always hoped that the day would come when I should be able to try Satan against her. Now the trial will be unfair."

Alas! for poor Black Bess.

She was no match now for the captain's splendid horse, which seemed to fly over the ground and to carry his master as though he was no heavier than the air.

Dick's heart swelled.

Hitherto Black Bess had carried off the palm, but now she was compelled to yield it.

Satan could easily have gone two miles to her one.

"But you do not tell me your motive," pursued Captain Hawk, after a lengthy pause.

"It is this," was the answer, given after much effort. "The road has no longer any charms for me. I am determined to quit it. I have already levied my last contribution."

"What do I hear?" ejaculated the captain. "This is more surprising than anything yet. Surely you are not in earnest—you are joking?"

"Far from it."

"Pardon me, I can see you are sad—there is some deep trouble about your heart."

"There is indeed."

"Tell it me. Surely you may confide in me to that extent."

"Yes—yes, I have nothing to conceal. It surprises me that you have not heard already."

"No, I have heard nothing."

"Well, then, the police officers surprised us all at Stonehenge. Maud—you remember Maud?"

Dick's voice faltered here.

He could say no more.

"Remember her?" cried Captain Hawk, in a manner that showed all his interest was awakened. "Of course I do! What of her?"

"She was mortally wounded by a pistol bullet," added Dick, speaking hurriedly, "Sixteen-String Jack made prisoner, and the rest made a temporary escape with difficulty."

"Good Heavens! Mortally wounded do you say? But—but—you do not mean that—that——"

"Yes, she is dead. Listen, I will tell you all. It may interest you a little, and it will certainly relieve my heart a little, for the worst is by no means told."

"It will interest me deeply," answered Captain Hawk; "and you may make sure of having my earnest sympathy."

"I know it."

Dick Turpin then, at some length, recounted those events which have been already laid before the reader.

The captain was deeply affected when he was made acquainted with the particulars of Maud's death.

Dick's emotion almost overcame him, and well-nigh put an end to his narrative altogether.

Rallying, he went on until he described how Tom King had fallen by his hand.

"It is a most unlucky circumstance," said Captain Hawk, "and one that nobody would regret more than I shall. Still, I think you are wrong in taking the blame to yourself—it was an accident, nothing more."

"I know that," was Turpin's answer; "but that does not alter the fact that my hand is red with the blood of my best friend."

"It is sad—very—very sad, but—and I hope you will excuse my persistent curiosity—I am still in the dark as to your reasons for undertaking this long ride."

"True—I had forgotten. The fact is, I have not perhaps what you would call a motive at all. But can you understand that, after all I have related to you, I should feel doubly anxious and determined to pursue my original course?"

"What was that?"

"Why, to leave England with as much expedition as I could, and make the best of my way to that little hamlet on the coast of France, where—where——"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Hawk, quickly, "I understand—go on."

"I feel that I would sooner end my days in peace and quiet near her grave than I would accept a crown even. But when added to all other disasters came the death of my best friend, Tom King, upon my head, I felt as though I could fly from myself—fly anywhere."

"No doubt it would affect you strongly."

"It did—more strongly by far than I can possibly express. I took the road to York without reflection—I may have done so unconsciously, because it was the intention of Tom and myself to pay a visit to that city. My foes came hard and fast upon my track; I distanced them at first without trouble—the ease with which I did so, and the freedom of my mare's movements, first caused me to conceive the idea of riding to York. I—I fancy I must have been somewhat excited then. Looking back, I don't think I should have taken such a resolution in a moment of calmness."

"I should think not, either."

"My idea was," continued Turpin, speaking with greater animation than before—"my idea was that, as we had made together some little stir in the world, we ought not to drop out of it obscurely. I was conscious that if we fled thus secretly, we should both be speedily forgotten. I was desirous, however, that Black Bess at least should be remembered by posterity, and spoken of as the steed that should eclipse all others. That made me think of riding her to York. The resolution was soon taken, for I believed the task to be within her powers. I fear now I have overrated them, but even if so we will do it yet—York now is close at hand."

CHAPTER MCI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN LOSES HIS LAST REMAINING FRIEND.

DICK TURPIN pronounced these words with a fervour strikingly at variance with his former dejection.

His eyes sparkled, and a feeble flush of colour suffused both his cheeks.

But Captain Hawk's attention was just then diverted.

He was listening.

His companion, however, was too much taken up with the prospect which the accomplishment of his purpose afforded him to notice it.

"Dick," Captain Hawk exclaimed, "we have not been making such good speed as your pursuers; I can hear them now behind us."

As a matter of course, these words aroused Dick at once.

During the somewhat lengthy conversation that had taken place they had by no means been standing still.

On the contrary, they had made good speed, and yet had not been going so fast as to render the keeping up of a conversation a very difficult matter.

Dick found that Captain Hawk was not mistaken.

He could distinguish the faint clatter of hoofs in the rear.

"I must be pushing on," he exclaimed. "They have got another lot of fresh horses, I suppose, and you may judge I shall have a little trouble in preserving my distance from them."

"I had hoped," said Captain Hawk, "to have had a trial of speed between Satan here and your mare, but the odds now are quite unequal."

"Yes, it would not be fair," said Turpin. And it is probable that he never regretted having brought his mare to this condition as he did now.

"If you will let me, though," added Captain Hawk, "I will gallop a little way with you. Not for the sake of making any trial of speed—for that would be manifestly absurd—but because I should like to keep you company for a little longer."

"With all my heart. Come on!"

Both horses now were put upon their mettle.

It was easy to perceive that Captain Hawk's horse Satan was a stimulus of no ordinary character to Black Bess.

She was, although so weary, yet full of fire and impatience to pass the stranger.

But the effort, though gallantly made, proved unsuccessful.

Satan kept the lead easily, and yet his rider was keeping him comparatively tight in hand.

Yet, as we have said, the emulation excited caused Black Bess to gallop for several miles at a speed which she would not otherwise have attained.

But all at once Captain Hawk pulled up.

There was nothing that Dick could see to cause him to do so, and therefore he looked towards him somewhat curiously.

"Dear me," he ejaculated, "you are going to York, and I have only just this moment thought of something which I ought to have told you at first."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The sight of you put it quite out of my head. When you first saw me I was riding rather swiftly, was I not?"

"You were, indeed."

"Well, then, it is now my turn to be confidential, though, as there is little time, I cannot enter into particulars. However, I have had an adventure in the good old city of York which has caused such a hue and cry after me as has never been heard of before. The officers were in full pursuit of me, and though I had got so well ahead of them I should not wonder if they are not still upon the road."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because they are a party of London officers who were sent to York upon some business or other, and they are upon their return journey."

"This is awkward."

"Very awkward. I take great blame to myself for not having thought about it sooner. However, there is still, for as yet there is no mischief done."

"But I fancy I shall find myself most unpleasantly between two troops of my foes unless I quit the highway, which for many reasons I am unwilling to do; and even if I did," he added, "there is no certainty that I should avoid this second troop."

"Believe me," exclaimed Captain Hawk, "I am sorry, deeply sorry that I should thus have increased your perplexity. But, however, as I got you into the difficulty so will I get you out of it."

"But how?"

"Never mind how. Let it be sufficient for you that I shall do it."

"But it is not sufficient for me," said Turpin, warmly; "I insist upon knowing what it is you intend to do!"

"Why, get you out of your difficulty. Have I not said so?"

"True, you have said that; but I want to know what means you are going to adopt."

"Perhaps you will object to them."

"I shall if it involves you in any danger in attempting to extricate me."

"Now I will tell you what I am going to do," said Captain Hawk; "but I warn you beforehand that I shall take no notice of any objections you may raise, but shall adhere to my purpose."

"Will you tell me what it is?" asked Turpin, impatiently. "I can already hear the hoofs of this second troop you speak of."

"Can you so? Then my purpose will be quickly carried out, and you shall have the high-road quite free before you."

Dick Turpin was full of anxiety to know what it was his companion had in contemplation.

That it was something unusually adventurous, he could gather from his manner and from his unwillingness to speak concerning it.

"There is no doubt about them being on the road," cried the captain, who occupied a position a little in advance of Turpin. "And now I will tell you just what I think of doing, and you will say in a moment it is the simplest and easiest thing in the world."

"Then why use so much circumlocution about it?"

Captain Hawk smiled.

"Listen!" he said, in a deliberate tone. "I am going to gallop on now as fast as I can until I catch sight of the officers who have been in pursuit of me."

"Nay, but—"

"Hold—I will hear nothing! When I catch sight of them, it follows that they must also at that identical moment catch sight of me. Good. I shall just take my course across the country—the open fields, you know—letting them see where I go. You may calculate as a certainty that they will all join in pursuit of me once more, and consequently your road will be clear."

The way in which Captain Hawk stated these intentions was really most amusing to listen to.

Dick was amazed, and well he might be, for he would hardly have contemplated such an act himself.

"Is it not a good plan, now?" asked Hawk, with a laugh.

"It may be, but I don't intend to let you carry it out."

"Let me see you prevent me! Ha, ha! I can do as I like! There was a time when perhaps Black Bess could have kept pace with Satan, but that certainly is not at present. Farewell! I feel assured that if you go to York we shall meet again."

With these lightly-uttered words upon his lips, Captain Hawk wheeled round, loosed the reins, and gave a peculiar signal.

Satan gave a bound forward, and in less than a moment vanished round a bend in the road.

To attempt pursuit Dick knew was futile, and how bitter was the pang which this knowledge caused him!

Always before he had been able to onstrip everything—now he was condemned to be a laggard.

His anger was great, and—sadly we say it—found its vent upon Black Bess.

With a savage desperation, much unlike his usual manner and totally in opposition to his treatment of his mare, he plunged both his spurs deeply into her dripping flanks.

The moment she felt the infliction of the sharp pain, a

cry, which can only be described by calling it a scream of agony, burst from the lips of Black Bess.

It was a terrible sound.

Dick shuddered as he heard it, and would have given worlds for the power to recall his hasty action.

But it was too late.

Snorting furiously, Black Bess broke into a mad gallop. Hard and fast as she went, however, Dick had not the slightest chance of coming up with Captain Hawk.

Still he kept a sharp look-out.

At length he exclaimed:

"He has been as good as his word, I see. There he goes, the officers after him! He has rendered me a good service, beyond all doubt," he continued, as he noted how strongly his foes mustered; "but yet the peril to himself is immense. It is certain that he has more valour, or rather recklessness, than discretion."

About the last part of Dick's speech there could scarcely be a doubt.

True to his expressed purpose, the captain had shown himself to his pursuers, and then led them off across the country.

They had snapped at the bait greedily enough, and so missed the prize they might have gained had they remained.

What made Captain Hawk's feat still more daring, was the circumstance of its being broad daylight, so that there would be little difficulty in keeping him in view.

Not one man in ten thousand would have thought of doing such a thing, but the captain was no ordinary individual, as the reader may yet learn, for it may be we shall hear something more of him.

That his boldness proceeded from the absolute reliance he placed in the speed his horse was able to make, is certain, yet many of his actions only seemed like tempting fate.

It was, however, a source of great satisfaction to Dick Turpin to observe that he kept ahead of his followers bravely; and unless some unforeseen accident should occur, he would doubtless altogether outdistance them in a little time.

At present, though, it is with Dick Turpin we have to do, not with Captain Hawk.

As soon as his attention was recalled from the chase he noted with a keen throb of anguish how terrible was the condition of his poor steed.

Her panting alone was dreadful to listen to; and then her head, no longer carried proudly by her nobly arching neck, hung down almost to the ground.

Round drops of moisture, looking more like tears than aught else, slowly trickled down her cheeks.

Her eyes protruded dreadfully, while her tongue lolled out of her foam-flecked mouth.

Dick groaned.

"And so at last, my bonny Black Bess," he said, in a bitter voice, "I have been brute enough to bring you to this. Had I been told, I would never have believed that I should have lived to see this. Fool—fool that I have been to allow a foolish prideful feeling—a yearning after empty fame—to bring you down to this! Fame—fame! What is fame in return for the loss of you, my own brave, true Black Bess?"

There were tears of genuine sorrow in Turpin's eyes as he thus spoke.

But he felt that such a manifestation of feeling was unworthy of him—that it betrayed weakness—and so he subdued it.

The rapidity with which he shook off this sad reflection was wonderful.

"There is no help for it," he said—"we cannot undo the past. But we can make the best possible use of the present and the future, and that I will strive my best to do. Repinings are quite useless, so I will give way to them no longer."

Black Bess was standing now.

She was quivering in every limb, and seemed incapable of travelling half a mile further.

"I have killed her," murmured Dick, in tones of the most poignant anguish—"I have killed her!"

Just then he happened to look across the road, and on a stone which he had not previously noticed, he read the words:—

"TO YORKE, XVIII MILES."

"No more than that," he murmured—"no more than that, and a full hour to do it in? And yet I fear it

might as well have been a hundred as eighteen—one is not a whit more possible than the other. And then to think that only yesterday she would have thought nothing of it. Now, to-day, what is she?"

Again Dick paused.

He was compelled to do so, for he was completely overcome.

But presently he spoke again:

"How hard—how vexatious a thing it is to fail—and to fail, too, at a moment when the much-wished-for end seemed graspable! I might as well now have never made the attempt. It will be said now that the boasted powers of Black Bess were overrated, or rather overtasked—that something was found which it was thought she could perform, but which turned out a failure. No—no. As I live, it shall never be!"

He brought down his clenched fist with great violence as he made the determination.

Yet, what use was there in it?

What could he do?

Suddenly a thought struck him.

His fingers wandered towards the pocket of his vest. He recollected the potion given him by the friendly ostler.

He drew forth the bottle and held it up towards the light.

"What latent properties can this drug have to produce so great an effect? Is it real or is it all a delusion? But above all, shall I try it? That is the question."

The repugnance he had felt to administer the drug had not much abated.

But he was undecided.

In that state a little would prove sufficient to determine him one way or other.

This something came in the shape of the hoofbeats of his indefatigable pursuers.

"I am like a gamester with a last stake," he exclaimed.

"It is my only chance. I will try it—I will try it. Black Bess cannot be made much worse than she is—"

Here a swelling in the throat prevented him from finishing what he was about to say.

But he soon continued.

"It may be that this will enable us to accomplish our nearly-over purpose, and if so, ought I to hesitate any longer? No—no, I will not! I will run the risk."

He dismounted as he spoke.

"It may be that it will cause you to gallop on till you fall down dead beneath me; but then we shall, perhaps, be so many miles nearer to York; and then, perhaps, after all, she might have a worse end. Better to die serving me, than to drag out a long but painful existence. No—no, Bess, I cannot bear the thought of losing you. It does not seem as though the day could ever come when we must part for ever."

While thus easing his breast by giving utterance to his reflections, his fingers were busily at work removing bit and bridle.

This was soon done, and the latter free from the foam-covered mass around it.

The bottle now was ready.

He uncorked it.

Yet he held it between his thumb and fingers reluctant still.

"You may lose me soon," he cried, addressing her; "and when you have—Bah! this is childish! But I may be picked off by a bullet, or— What am I talking of? Yet every now and then there comes over me the consciousness that my end is drawing near—that my race is nearly run. Nonsense—nonsense! At any rate, Bess," he concluded, "I would rather see you die beneath me than be obliged to leave you to the mercies of other people. About that I have no sort of doubt. I should be better content if I knew the end of you."

So saying, Dick Turpin raised his hand with the air of a man who has taken a desperate resolution, but who is compelled to be hasty in carrying it out lest his heart should fail him.

A moment afterwards the drug was poured down the throat of Black Bess.

Dick cast the empty bottle from him.

Then, standing still, he watched to see whether any alteration was perceptible.

He had not long to wait.

Whatever the components of that drug might be, they

must have had when aggregated a marvellous power, for as he gazed, Dick could plainly perceive his mare draw herself together, so to speak, and to stand more as was her wont.

Once more—and a pang rent her master's heart as the reflection crossed him that it might be for the last time—once more her neck arched, her eyes brightened, and her fore-foot pawed the ground.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" ejaculated Turpin. "This surpasses all belief. If its effects will only endure for the space of one short hour I shall care not—our purpose will be achieved."

He was so intent in watching Black Bess, and congratulating himself upon the fact that he should not have to suffer the mortification of failure, that he completely forgot all about his foes.

But he was soon reminded of them by hearing the loud clatter of their approaching horses.

Well-nigh worn out as he was, Dick yet bent a defiant gaze upon them.

Then mounting, he waved his hat as though daring them to the pursuit, and once more gave Black Bess the impulse forward.

The administered drug had now had time to work its full results, and under the influence of it the gallant mare again broke into a gallop.

It could not be expected, however, that this should be anything like equal to her ordinary mode of going, yet it answered Dick's purpose.

Once more the hedgerows, now glistening with dew-drops in the early morning sun, flew past him.

Once more the milestones rapidly succeeded one another.

Once more Dick's spirits rose to their highest pitch.

His foes, too, had dropped off to less than half their former number.

Neither flesh, blood, nor the seats of their smallclothes could withstand the never-ceasing friction of the saddle, and one by one they had dropped off from sheer inability to sit any longer.

Skellum suffered no slight inconvenience from this cause, for scarcely any rider, however well practised, could keep the saddle for so many hours unintermittedly without feeling the disagreeable consequences of it.

But Mr. Skellum's fierce and dogged nature would not have permitted him to succumb to a much greater evil than this, and so he kept on, encouraging by his example those men to follow him who would otherwise have fallen off.

Moreover, he pointed out to those who remained that if they finally succeeded, as he felt assured they must, the fewer that were in at the death the greater would be the share of the reward that each would receive, those who had discontinued the chase not being entitled to anything for their exertions.

This, of course, was a great inducement.

"Never mind the pain," Skellum concluded; "grin and bear it. Stick to your work like men, and the money will prove an excellent healing plaster."

With renewed hope and spirits the men continued the chase, for they had too palpably seen how distressed Black Bess was to have any doubts about their speedy success, provided they could continue to hold out a little longer.

In the meanwhile Dick Turpin found Black Bess tearing over the ground in a manner he had little anticipated.

Indeed, he found it difficult to credit the evidence of his own senses.

The first ten miles were accomplished with apparently little effort.

No stronger proof than this could be brought forward of the surprising efficacy of the ostler's potion.

"Eight miles!"

The words were uttered by Dick Turpin with an exultant shout that so amazed a man ploughing in an adjacent field that he stopped his team at once, and stood gazing in dull wonderment after the flying horseman.

Eight miles!

To Dick this distance seemed as nothing.

Every moment he expected to catch sight of his destination.

"It will be done," he cried—"done easily. Bravo, Bess! it is a feat that will never be forgotten—one that will perpetuate your name for ever. Eight miles! On—

on, gallant steed! Rest and peace are now before you—on—on—"

But at this moment the gallant creature stumbled.

Dick snatched the rein suddenly, and she continued as before.

But, nevertheless, the occurrence made the highwayman's heart sink like lead.

All his exultation was gone.

Anxiety and dismay took its place.

The drug was losing its potent, subtle influence.

Never had his mare stumbled so before, and he was conscious that but for the stimulus of the drug she would long since have dropped down insensible or dead.

And this was what he now dreaded.

For all that, he could tell the effects would evaporate as speedily as they were produced.

If so, he had to dread her downfall every moment, and, if so, what was to be done?

The police officers were not in sight just then, but if he lingered they soon would be.

These reflections passed very rapidly through his mind, and yet, short as was the time, Bess stumbled again.

And on this occasion, too, it was a stumble of a much worse character.

With infinite difficulty she kept her legs, and, as if full of anger at the manifestation of such a symptom of weakness, tried most desperately to gallop on as before.

But the effort was a vain one.

Dick felt her reel beneath him.

She swayed fearfully from side to side.

Still she kept on.

Dick Turpin let her go at her own will.

He felt that it was his only chance.

His thoughts now were of such a character as were gathered to defy any attempt at description.

As for Bess, she bounded on, it is true; but more with the fashion of a galvanised automaton than a real living creature.

Dick sat upon her back in a stupor of despair.

At every moment he expected to see her fall, but to his astonishment she still kept on.

In the distance he saw a milestone.

Would she reach it?

Yes, it is reached and passed.

Dick, looking intently, sees upon it the figure 3.

He cannot read, but he knows that represents the number of miles intervening between that spot and York.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated. "Can it be possible that, after all, we are to fail—to fail now that we are so close to our destination? Ah!" he exclaimed, as a turn in the roadway enabled him to see some distance in advance—"ah, there is York!"

"Look—look, Bess," he exclaimed, addressing himself to his all but worn-out steed—"look, Bess, there is the point I wish so much to reach; there—there is York! Courage—courage! We shall do it yet, old girl—I feel assured we shall—do it, too, within the time! Courage—courage! We are almost there!"

As before, her master's voice induced Black Bess to increase her efforts.

But it was a fatal attempt.

Again she stumbled.

This time her knees fairly touched the ground.

But, with a snort, she recovered her upright position.

She trembled, though, in every limb.

She struggled on a little way, swaying fearfully the while from side to side.

Even at this, the last gasp, her courage was indomitable.

She would not give in, but strung up every nerve and sinew for a final effort.

Dick knew not what to do, and so sat in the saddle like one stupefied.

He was certain his mare was going.

Still, to his astonishment, she staggered on.

Then, finally, as though by sheer desperation, broke into a gallop.

But it did not last out half a dozen yards.

All at once—without any preparation save a slight tremor of all her limbs—she went down.



[THE BLOODHOUNDS ARE LET LOOSE UPON DICK TURPIN'S TRACK.]

Went down like some animal suddenly struck down at the shambles.

Although in one sense Dick Turpin was prepared for this occurrence, yet, nevertheless, he was taken by surprise.

So instantaneous was the fall, and so little expected at that precise juncture, that he could not save himself.

He tried, but the attempt was a failure.

Almost as if he had been projected from some piece of ordnance, he shot over his mare's neck.

He came down heavily in the roadway upon his head, and such was the impetus that he rolled over and over in the dust for several yards.

There he remained for some moments quite insensible.

A painful sensation in his chest, as though it was pressed upon by some heavy weight, was the next thing of which he was conscious.

No. 241.—BLACK BESS.

Slowly he raised his head, too confused at present to comprehend the exact nature of his position, and to recollect with anything like clearness what had last occurred.

But remembrance soon came back.

He had only to look a little way down the roadway.

There was a sight to be seen there which he could scarcely gaze upon without being heartbroken.

Lying at full length on her side—her flanks rising and falling with a convulsive motion, her neck and head stretched out till they formed nearly a straight line, her eyes glassy and dim, her mouth wide open with the lips retracted, her tongue protruded and half cut in two by the sharp steel bit, her whole body reeking—was poor Black Bess!

She had taken her last gallop—her race was run.

She had perished in the effort to serve her master.

CHAPTER MCII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE AS GOOD AS HIS WORD.

Yes, all was over.

Poor Black Bess had approved her fidelity with her death.

She had served her master too well—that master who should have given her more consideration.

Yet there was nothing of reproach in the way in which she raised her head, with a painful and languid movement, and looked after her master.

Slowly and painfully, Dick rose to his feet.

It was not so much pain in his limbs, however, as it was the dead weight about his heart which kept him down.

Remorse, deep and bitter, had seized upon him.

He approached with a hesitating, undecided step.

The aspect of poor Black Bess stretched almost lifeless upon the roadway, struck more daggers in his heart than could the most acrimonious of reproaches.

As he advanced, he bent his head down towards the ground.

Bess neighed faintly.

Dick responded by a heavy groan.

The next moment he stood beside her.

Then, with a loud cry of grief and despair, which would much have amazed anyone who had chanced to hear it, he flung himself wildly on his knees.

His faithful mare raised her head still more, and made an ineffectual attempt to rise.

But her master clasped his arms tightly round her neck and pressed her head to his breast.

"My poor, poor Bess!" he cried. "And has it come to this? Is this the end? Now that the worst has happened, I can scarcely believe but that I have been made the sport of some terrible delusion! I am like one in a dream."

Another sob at this moment choked his utterance.

He stroked his mare's neck a few times, and then continued, half aloud:

"Can it be that you have run your last race—that you have sacrificed yourself for your unworthy master? Yes—yes, hard and terrible as belief is, I can hold out against it no longer! You are dying, Bess: yes—yes, surely and swiftly dying! I can see it in your dimming eyes! Alas—alas! Dying, and for what?"

He paused, for just then his ear caught the sound of bells.

He listened intently,

It was a clock striking.

It was the chiming of the four quarters which had first attracted his attention.

Then, after that, he counted, one by one, several distinct booming sounds, telling the hour.

There were nine of them.

As the last reached his ears, his face assumed an air of animation which afforded a striking contrast to his former gloom.

"I am answered," he ejaculated, as the last of the ringing sounds died away—"I am answered! It was that—it was to hear those chimings! The feat is achieved, Bess! We are at York, for those were the bells in the old Minster that I heard. The journey has been performed within the time! It has cost you your life, my gallant Bess; but I can spare it. You might have lived longer, but it would have been to die perhaps ignobly. And what gallant action has ever yet been achieved that has not involved some great sacrifice or other? The sacrifice this time has been your life!"

This last reflection reconciled Dick in some slight degree to that loss which however much he might deplore it, was inevitable.

For his own part, he felt that he should no longer have occasion for his mare's services, and therefore it is not surprising that he should prefer to see her lying stiff and stark before him than for her to fall into other hands.

His mind once more reverted to that peaceful village near the sea-shore, and a stronger inclination than ever sprung up in his mind to hasten there.

He was aroused from these meditations by feeling his mare's head slip out of his embrace.

A moment afterwards there was a convulsive shuddering of her whole body.

Her ribs expanded, and so great was the force with which that the saddle-girths were snapped asunder.

Then ensued a long and heavily-exhaled breath.

It was her last!

There was a slight movement of the muscles.

Then all was still.

Black Bess—the highwayman's stanch, invaluable friend—the incomparable steed, whether for qualities of beauty, shape, fleetness, or endurance, for she possessed them all in the highest degree—Black Bess was dead!

When Dick Turpin realised that the mysterious essence called life had departed—that nothing remained of his priceless steed but a mass of senseless flesh, his grief burst out afresh, and continued for some time without intermission.

But at last it wore itself away, as every violent emotion will—perhaps all the sooner in his case because of the danger with which he was threatened, and the difficulties he had to contend against.

Moreover, he recollected that his purpose was not altogether carried out, and he renewed his determination to complete it.

The question, too, arose as to what he should do with the body of his mare.

To leave it in the highway, subject to all manner of indignities, was a thing to which he could not bring his mind at all.

And yet, how was he to dispose of it?

He looked around him almost despairingly, but in a moment afterwards his features altered in expression.

This was because he perceived on one side of him a rather high stone wall—such a one as would form a boundary to some nobleman's estate—which was pierced by a light iron gate.

At the first glance Dick saw that this gate was only fastened by means of an iron latch.

This he raised, and pushed the gate wide open.

Then, by dint of putting forth all the strength which he possessed, he dragged Black Bess across the road towards it.

It was a toilsome operation, and, but for the intense disinclination he felt to leaving her on the highway, he would have abandoned his undertaking in despair.

Moreover, the reader must have been struck by the fact that it would be of the highest importance to conceal the body of Black Bess from his pursuers.

Dick wanted, if possible, to keep them ignorant of the fact that he was afoot.

This helped to make him persevere in his intention.

Nearer and nearer his load was dragged, until at length he passed through the gate.

Then he paused a little while to rest, for the exertion was almost too much for him in his present wearied state.

The success which had attended his endeavours so far would naturally have the effect of stimulating him to a still greater degree.

His rest, therefore, was a short one.

But it took nearly the whole of his remaining strength to drag Black Bess where he desired to place her.

This was close under the stone wall of which we have spoken.

His foes were too close behind him for him to have the time to dig a grave, though this was what he would have preferred to do.

Besides, he was unprovided with the requisite implements.

This, then, was perforce abandoned, but he did the next best thing in his power.

Close at hand was a great quantity of newly-fallen leaves—in some places they were quite knee-deep.

With these he covered her over, and so well did he work that in less than ten minutes nothing could be seen of her but a huge bed of leaves.

"It grieves me, Bess," he had said, as he covered up the last visible remnant of her body "to think that I can give you no better burial. But yet you will rest here as well as in a gorgeous tomb. I may, too, have the opportunity of placing you beneath the turf. We shall see—we shall see!"

He paused in saddened thought.

His reverie might have lasted some time had not his

quick ears caught the sound of a horseman approaching.

"What am I to do next?" he asked, arousing himself. "I feel like a vessel without a rudder or a helmsman. What am I to do?"

He walked a few paces nearer to the little iron gate.

"Let me think," he continued. "I undertook to be at the Bowling Green this morning at nine o'clock. In that respect, at any rate, I shall fail, for it is past nine already. Yet I will be as good as my word, even though I am a little late—I will go on to York."

Having come to this determination, he stepped out into the high-road.

The sound of a horse's hoofs could now be heard very plainly indeed, and, glancing in the direction of the sound, he perceived a mounted traveller approaching.

He was coming from York.

At the first glance Dick took a resolution.

He shrank back through the gateway, and, drawing forth one of his pistols, examined it attentively.

It required a little attention to the priming, and by the time this had been put right the horseman was very close at hand indeed.

But Dick was ready.

Choosing the proper moment, he suddenly emerged and placed himself exactly in the centre of the highway.

The gentleman's horse, frightened at his sudden appearance and firm demeanour, brought itself to a standstill with so much abruptness that it rose on its haunches, while its fore legs pawed the air.

Dick was ready as he came down again to seize the rein, which he held with a grasp of iron.

No one could possibly have been more amazed than was this gentleman Dick had so unceremoniously dealt with.

To be stopped thus within a couple of miles of old York City, and by broad daylight, too, seemed beyond the pale of all belief.

But Dick Turpin's first words convinced him that it was a reality.

"Dismount," he said, in the short sharp tones of one accustomed to military command—"dismount!"

"What for?"

"Because I want your horse."

"Well, of all the d—d impudence——"

"Hold—hold, I have no time to waste in words. I want your horse, and, take my word for it, the wisest thing you can do is to submit quietly, for I am not in the humour to put up with any trifling."

"Well, but——"

"Dismount, I tell you! I want your horse!"

"But I decline."

"Then I shall be obliged to have recourse to force. Do you see this pistol? It is loaded, and I looked to the priming not a moment ago. If you don't alight I shall use it to compel you."

"But, my good fellow, I am bound on business of the utmost importance. I assure you it will not brook a moment's delay——"

"I can't help that! Your horse I must and will have!"

"But do you think I will tamely submit to lose my property in this fashion?"

"You will not lose it."

"Not lose it?" echoed the traveller, with an incredulous air.

"Certainly not. I am in haste to reach York; and if you will lend me your horse for that purpose I will either leave it for you at your house or in any part of York you like to name."

"That sounds very like a whale, does it not?"

"Never mind, I will parley no longer. Your steed you will have to surrender, and it is for you to choose whether you will do so with or without the sacrifice of your life."

Dick's resolute air was not to be doubted, and the traveller had sense enough to see that he would at all risks be as good as his word.

Accordingly, he quitted the saddle, though the manner in which he did so showed how much this act went against the grain.

Dick was mounted in a moment.

"Understand me," he said, "yours will be no loss. I

am going to the Bowling Green, and there I will leave your horse. You can have it again in half an hour's time if you think fit."

The traveller, who happened to be a very respectable attorney in the City of York, was still incredulous.

Dick Turpin, however, gave him time to say no more, but turning the horse's head, used the spurs vigorously, and dashed off at a gallop.

The attorney looked after him as long as he was in sight, and then murmured, with a rueful air:

"People will call me a fool for giving up my horse so easily; but what the devil could I do? I only hope the rascal will be as good as his word; but I doubt it—I doubt it."

The lawyer stood a moment or two in deep thought, as though endeavouring to come to a decision whether it would be better for him to retrace his steps or continue on his journey.

The trampling of hoofs aroused him, and looking along the road, he caught sight of Mr. Skellum and the remnant of his party.

Both horses and riders seemed to be in the last stage of exhaustion and distress.

Their half immersion in the river had by no means improved the appearance of the officers, and they were moreover covered thickly with dust and the foam from the mouths of their jaded steeds.

Their whole aspect indeed was such as to attract the attention of the most careless observer.

The York attorney was filled with astonishment and curiosity.

Perceiving him, Mr. Skellum drew rein in order to make a few inquiries, for some time had elapsed since he had last seen anyone upon the road.

"Good morning," he said, raising himself in the stirrups, for in the present condition of his skin, anything was preferable to sitting. "Have you seen anything of a red-coated fellow on a black horse?"

"No, I have not."

"You have not?" gasped Mr. Skellum, who was very far from anticipating this reply.

"Certainly not."

"How far have you come?"

"From my house in York?"

"And you have kept along the highway?"

"Yes."

"And you have not seen anyone answering to the description I have given?"

"What description?"

"Why, a man in a red coat, much dirtied and torn, though, and with a generally wild appearance."

"Well," said the attorney, "I have certainly seen a man who would answer to that description——"

"Yes, yes!"

"But he was not on horseback."

"Not on horseback?"

"No."

"How then?"

"On foot."

"And was he going towards York?"

"D—n him! I should think he is there by this time."

"Come—come," said Skellum, shifting himself about uneasily, "I can see you know something more of this matter. Let me know all."

"First give me a reason why I should satisfy your curiosity."

"I can easily do that. We are police officers from London, in pursuit of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

The lawyer repeated the name.

"You have heard of him, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have heard some extraordinary and incredible tales respecting such a man."

"Well, then, I will undertake to say you never heard of anything half so extraordinary as this last feat of his. I would not have believed it, only I have been a witness to the whole."

"What is it?"

"Why, he has ridden from London to here in just twelve hours."

"Nonsense!"

"Your disbelief does not surprise me, but it is a fact, nevertheless."

"That he rode on horseback from London to York in twelve hours?"

"Yes. This time last night we were in Drury Lane, which, as you may happen to know, is near enough the centre of London."

"I know it well. And you have made the journey in the same time?"

"Yes, we have been in hot pursuit of him all the way; and though we have been furnished with relays of horses at about every twenty miles, yet we have been unable to overtake him."

"And how many horses had this highwayman?"

"How many?" ejaculated Skellum, amazed that any one should ask such a question.

"Yes, how many?"

"Why, one, to be sure!"

It was now the attorney's turn to be amazed.

"Do you mean in sober earnestness to tell me that a man has ridden two hundred miles in twelve hours with one horse?"

"It is an incontrovertible fact. There is but one steed in the world that could have performed such a feat, and that is the highwayman's mare, Black Bess."

The attorney was scarcely able to believe yet what he had heard, and he required Mr. Skellum to repeat it.

"Well," he said, drawing a long breath, "the circumstance seems well attested. I don't know how you could have fallen into any mistake, nor is there any likelihood that you would depose to what you knew to be untrue."

"Certainly not," said Skellum. "It is small credit to us to have to acknowledge that we could not overtake him. But I admire the animal; and if I had Dick Tuspin here this moment, I do believe I would let him off, provided he would give me his mare, Black Bess, in recompense. But come, sir, I have satisfied your curiosity pretty well, and have rested my horse into the bargain. But I cannot afford any more time. Tell me now what you know, for I am certain you possess information."

The attorney made no attempt at concealment.

"I feel pretty sure," he said, "that I have seen the fellow you want, but he was without his steed."

"That is strange," said Skellum. "I have not seen it. What can he have done with it?"

"I can answer that question no better than yourself."

"And you say he has gone to York?"

"Yes. I suppose you have noticed these heavy riding-boots?"

"I have, and wondered why you should choose them to walk in."

"I did not choose them for that purpose—I put them on this morning because I had a long and important journey to make on urgent business matters. I rode close to this spot, when all at once the fellow we are talking of darted into the middle of the road, seized my horse, and compelled me to dismount."

"Why did you not capture him?"

"Because he looked an ugly customer to meddle with, and I had no idea who he was. Being under fear of my life, I chose to alight. In a moment he then sprang into the saddle and galloped off towards York."

"Curse it!" said Skellum. "This is most unfortunate! I am afraid we shall lose him, after all, for doubtless yours is a good horse."

"One of the best in the county, though I say it."

"It's all up, then. We have had our trouble for nothing, for I'll wager my life he rides it till it drops."

"I am afraid so, too. And yet he led me to understand that he was going no farther than York—at least, he said his destination was the Bowling Green, and that I could have my horse there in half an hour's time if I chose to apply for it."

"Gammon!" said Skellum, as he put his finger in a very waggish way by the side of his nose—"gammon! I think I see him at it!"

"I thought it an unlikely thing myself," said the attorney, with a sigh. "D—n the fellow! I would not have parted with the horse for a hundred and fifty guineas."

"Well, we will push on to the Bowling Green now we have come so far," exclaimed Skellum, with an air of in-

tense aggravation. "Not that I have the slightest hope of finding him now. But come on—come on!"

"I wish I could come with you," cried the attorney. "But your horses seem hardly able to carry themselves."

"Not one could stand a double burden."

"No, I can see that plainly enough. Go on—I will walk."

Mr. Skellum at once set forward, and the attorney, cursing his ill-luck, prepared to follow him on foot.

But the sound of wheels behind him caused him to turn round, and then he saw approaching at a rapid rate a light vehicle on two wheels.

It was occupied only by one person, and this turned out to be one of the attorney's intimate friends.

The vehicle was stopped at once—the attorney entered it, and began to recount his morning's adventures.

The horse harnessed to the vehicle got over the ground in a capital style.

Consequently, it was not long before the attorney passed the police officers, who were not a little annoyed to think they could not be the first to arrive at the Bowling Green.

Leaving both parties, we will follow Dick.

It need not be said that he made the best use of the horse he had so unexpectedly gained possession of.

The spires of York drew nearer and nearer, and in the space of little more than ten minutes Dick pulled up suddenly in front of the Bowling Green Inn.

At that early hour in the morning—for ten o'clock had not yet struck—it was not likely that many people would be found amusing themselves on the smooth piece of grass in front of the rustic-looking public-house.

Still, there were a few loiterers.

The landlord hurried forward as soon as he saw a horseman pull up in front of the door, and bawled loudly for the ostler.

Dick dismounted, and as he did so he said:

"This is not my horse. Place him in the stable until the gentleman calls for him. I was to have been here by nine o'clock."

"Then you are late," rejoined the host.

"What is the time?"

"Five-and-twenty to ten."

"Thanks," said Dick. "I am sorry I am more than half an hour behind time; but I have had an awkward tumble. Bring me some brandy."

Dick strolled off to one of the many wooden seats that were placed round the Bowling Green.

The landlord looked after him with a little curiosity, which is not surprising when Dick's appearance is taken into consideration.

Still, the mention he had made of an ugly tumble was almost sufficient to account for it.

The brandy was brought.

Dick drained it at a draught.

Then joined the players.

To have seen him at this moment, no one would have dreamed he was the bold highwayman with whose exploits England had rung so long.

Nor would they have thought, when seeing the smile upon his face as he entered into the spirit of the sport, that his heart was bleeding, or that he had sustained so terrible a loss.

Black Bess was the sole tie that bound him to life.

Now she had gone, what would become of him?

At this present time it seemed as though he did not care.

Perhaps it was drinking brandy while in such a heated state, and at a time when he required substantial nourishment, that produced this reckless effect upon him.

He was ready for any deed, however desperate.

He played with great skill and determination, winning every game, to the no small annoyance of those present, who by no means relished a stranger's stepping in and bearing away the ball in such a triumphant style.

There was a pause, and in the silence the Minster clock struck ten.

Dick counted the strokes aloud, in a manner so peculiar and significant as to attract the notice of all.

"So late," he exclaimed, as he threw down the bowl with which he was about to commence playing another game—"so late! I cannot stay any longer. Good morning, gentlemen!"

He tossed half-a-crown to the landlord; then, turning on his heel, he walked rapidly away, vanishing almost instantly round the corner of a street.

"That is a queer fish, any way!" exclaimed the landlord, biting the coin, in order to be sure it was of the right metal. "I wonder, now what he wants at York?"

Hardly had he pronounced the words than the sound of wheels was heard, and in an instant all eyes were turned towards the road.

The arrivals were the attorney and his friend.

Both were well known to the landlord.

"Good morning, Mr. Bridgeman," he said, addressing the former. "I thought you said last night you should be obliged to take a long journey this morning."

"And you are right," said the lawyer, alighting; "but I have come for my horse. Is it here?"

"I do believe it is your horse now I come to think of it. I fancied I had seen the animal before," said the landlord, speaking more to himself than to his interrogator.

"Is it here?" asked the attorney, in an anxious voice, for he had not ventured to think for a moment that he should ever see his much-prized steed again.

"Yes," said the landlord; "he is in the stable."

"Let me see him; I shall believe my own eyes."

This was said as though he should believe nothing else.

But at this moment the landlord's attention was again distracted.

This time the cause was no other than the arrival of Mr. Skellum and his party.

He had managed to push along at much better speed than could have been expected.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he recognised the attorney, "have you any intelligence?"

"I think the horse is here. I am just going to see."

"If it is, then, rely upon it the fellow himself is not far off."

With these words, Mr. Skellum deliberately and carefully dismounted.

Having done so, he hobbled after the attorney and the landlord, for his legs were so stiff with riding that he could scarcely make any use of them whatever.

However, he managed to reach the stable door.

"Well, sir," he asked, "is your horse here?"

"To my unbounded astonishment, he is," answered Mr. Bridgeman. "I little thought of looking on him again."

"But where's the man that brought him?"

No one knew.

Mr. Skellum gazed keenly all around, but seeing nothing suspicious, began to ask for details.

His questions were eagerly responded to.

Prepared as he was for almost anything that Dick might do, yet he, nevertheless, felt strong doubts assail him upon hearing that the highwayman had actually had the audacity to remain half an hour at the inn and the sangfroid to join in a game at bowls.

It seemed absolutely incredible, but there were too many eager witnesses around to allow him to indulge in disbelief.

It was also a matter of additional vexation to Mr. Skellum that at the very last he should miss his prey by what could only be called a hair's breadth.

He had left such a short time before too—such a few minutes—that he could not have walked many hundred yards.

In this all agreed, while some added that he must have been noticed, his appearance and manners were so singular, and so calculated to attract the observation of the inhabitants of the city.

Hope once more warmed Mr. Skellum's heart.

It did more, for it infused a little vigour into those limbs which but a moment before had been so nearly lifeless.

Surely the clue was good—the scent warm.

The highwayman was on foot, in a strange city, and as he was but mortal, of course not exempt from that fatigue which must be the result of the achievement he had just performed.

Calling his men around him then, Mr. Skellum, also on foot, began a fresh search, feeling sure by what the people

at the Bowling Green said that he must come up with him in a few moments.

To these persons the game of bowls had no present interest.

They chose to follow at the heels of the police officers. Up one street and down another they sped.

What words can portray their disappointment and vexation when they found themselves unable to catch a glimpse of him.

What was more, although they questioned numberless people, not one had seen him.

This was mysterious indeed.

But had Dick Turpin melted into air he could not have vanished more completely.

Mr. Skellum and everyone else concluded he was hiding somewhere.

But the indefatigable hunter of highwaymen could continue the search no longer, for the simple reason that sheer fatigue compelled him to desist.

So thoroughly worn out that he could scarcely move a limb, he crawled back to the inn and flung himself down to take that rest which was imperative.

CHAPTER MCIII.

RELATES THE ADVENTURES OF DICK TURPIN AFTER LEAVING THE BOWLING GREEN.

THE disappearance of Dick Turpin was most extraordinary, but yet it was a fact.

How he had contrived to vanish without leaving the faintest trace behind him, no one could imagine.

But he had gone, and so speedily that no one had seen him, nor was, as we have seen, the closest search and the most diligent inquiry in the least degree availing.

How this mystery came about it is now our business to describe.

It was a return of the old bravado inherent in his nature that made Dick Turpin join in as a player in the game of bowls.

Another feeling also urged him, and that was to establish abundant evidence of the precise hour of his arrival in York city.

This done, he proceeded to look after his own safety.

He was as yet by no means tired of his life, and knew that in order to preserve it he must elude his foes, whose appearance he expected every moment to witness.

And, indeed, had the bold highwayman been ever so weary of existence he would not have been willing to permit his enemies the triumph of making him their prisoner.

Once captured, there was no mistake about what the result would be.

To think of escape would be futile, for the most extraordinary precautions would be taken for his safe keeping.

Nor was Dick in love with that ignominious death which would be the termination of his captivity.

On the contrary, he would do all he could to avoid it, for death in any other form would be preferable.

This will give the reader some idea of the state of the highwayman's mind after he quitted the Bowling Green.

Fatigued, downcast, vinously excited as he was, yet all his wits were about him, and he was wondering by what means he could effectually elude his pursuers.

At this time he found himself in a long, narrow, deserted street.

The houses on either side were of an ancient build, each having overhanging stories, after the fashion approved of by our forefathers.

Although it was a bright day, yet this old street was full of gloomy shadows.

Dick Turpin, all the time thinking busily, looked attentively at every object without perceiving anything that would assist him in his design.

He was interrupted by the sound of wheels in the distance.

As if instinctively, he felt a desire to hide himself.

A place of concealment offered itself close at hand.

This was a dark, open doorway—apparently the means by which access to the rear of the houses in the street could be obtained.

Into this dark recess he shrank, and there remained until the approaching vehicle should pass by.

So obscure was the place where he stood that it was

next to an impossibility for him to be seen, especially by one whirling by in a vehicle.

But from this place Dick was able to see perfectly well who went by.

He had good cause to rejoice at his prompt obedience to the instinct of concealing himself.

As the reader may have anticipated, the vehicle was the one in which the attorney was riding in company with his friend.

Had he seen Dick he would have recognised him beyond all doubt.

Turpin drew back still further.

But the danger was over.

The light gig had passed by, and the attorney never once troubled himself to look behind.

Yet Dick remained where he was, not liking to emerge until the gig was out of sight.

This soon happened.

The opportunity had arrived.

Dick was about to emerge when, to his vexation, he saw something else approaching.

This was a huge tarpaulin-covered waggon, drawn by three horses.

The rate they were going at was certainly under three miles an hour; and by the way they walked they appeared to have an unusually heavy load behind them.

The hope that after this was gone he should have the street to himself made him resolve to linger.

But the time consumed by the approach of the heavy waggon seemed endless.

The driver, Dick noted, was perched up on a high seat holding the reins, and, according to the custom of waggons in general, his eyes were fast shut—probably he was sleeping.

These may seem trifling things to notice, but then in the state Dick was, every object, no matter how apparently trivial, had for him the strongest interest.

He afterwards had reason to congratulate himself upon having observed so narrowly.

As the waggon passed by, of course he had a view of the end of it.

He then became aware that it was loaded with sacks of grain, although two flapping sheets of canvas partially covered them.

At this moment he was struck by an idea.

He did not wait to consider of it, but proceeded to put it into execution almost as soon as he had conceived it.

Darting swiftly from his place of concealment, he ran to the end of the waggon, seized hold of a rope that was dangling from the top, and with great agility and swiftness swung himself on to the top of the sacks.

Then without loss of time he crawled further in and laid himself down at full length.

So swiftly did all this take place that it amazed even himself, so short was the time elapsing between the thought and the act.

He believed, too, that no one had observed the action.

Most certainly the somnolent driver of the waggon knew nothing of the matter.

But had not Dick acted so much upon impulse, reflection would have suggested to him that it was somewhat important he should know where the vehicle was going.

Of this he was in entire ignorance; but as the step was taken, the best thing he could do was to remain still and await the result.

He was startled from his reflections by the sound of horses' feet.

Then, almost immediately after he heard a voice cry, in stentorian tones:

"Hullo there—hullo, I say!"

"Waur-whoop!" bawled the waggoner, waking up with a start.

His team at once came to a standstill.

Then the horses' feet stopped also.

Could they be Dick's foes?

The highwayman rolled over noiselessly on the sacks, and crept a little nearer to the front.

"Which is the way to the Bowling Green?" asked a voice.

"Don't yow know?"

"Of course not, or I should not ask."

"Why, it's just at the top of the street yonder; yow'll see it when yow get a little further."

"Then yow have just come from there?"

"No, I hanna; but I passed it not long since."

"Ha! that's the same thing. Have yow seen anything of a man in a dirty red coat?"

"Dirty red coat?"

"Yes."

"No, I hanna."

"I don't suppose he has. He would be coming along with his eyes shut, without seeing anything."

"And if I wor, what's that to yow?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Very well, then, hold yow row."

"Only," said Mr. Skellum—for it was that individual and his troop of men—"if yow do see him, lay hold of him and keep him. There is a thousand pounds reward offered for him!"

At first, Dick had been not a little startled at finding the waggon stopped by his enemies; but, recovering himself, he crawled still nearer towards a fold of the canvas top, through which he hoped to be able to catch a sight of the men who had kept so indefatigably upon his track.

He saw them plainly enough in all conscience, for they were not above a yard from him.

While Skellum was speaking to the waggoner in the way we have recorded, he little thought that the eyes of the man he so much wanted to capture were fixed intently upon him—that he was, indeed, within his reach, had he but stretched out his arm to its full length.

Nothing, however, could have been further from the thoughts of Mr. Skellum and his party than that Dick was there.

A few more words passed between him and the waggoner.

Then he trotted off.

With no little difficulty, the waggoner then got his team into motion again.

As for Dick, emboldened by what had just occurred, he actually had the audacity to creep to the end of the waggon and look after his foes.

He could see them plainly enough, though it would have required a much keener vision than they possessed for them to discover him.

The next consideration which presented itself to Dick was rather an anxious one.

This was as to the destination of the waggoner.

If he was about to deliver his load to some place in the city it would be very awkward indeed for Dick, because his discovery would be inevitable; and his presence there unknown to the driver, and his soiled, travel-stained appearance would be certain to excite suspicion.

Moreover, Dick knew as well as could be that Mr. Skellum, on reaching the Bowling Green, would learn how very recently the object of his pursuit had quitted it, and would therefore institute a strict search immediately.

In a quiet place like York, news of this description would doubtless spread with amazing rapidity; and if an hour elapsed before the waggon stopped, he would, ten to one, be recognised.

This consideration was enough to cause Dick a great deal of anxiety, for never in all his life had he been so desirous or determined to get out of the clutches of the police officers.

Then, he was quite a stranger in York; and as the waggon traversed street after street, he was unable to form any idea as to whether he was being taken towards the open country or not.

Amid all this anxiety, he found his recumbent position on the sacks of grain a very comfortable one, for, after what he had gone through, he felt it no ordinary relief to stretch his limbs out at full length and remain perfectly still.

Thus he awaited the course of events.

At last he began to perceive indications that they were approaching the outskirts of the city, and finally he saw that the horses had entered upon a long, broad high-road.

Having made this discovery, he felt tolerably at his ease.

His enemies could have no clue to his whereabouts, and he indulged in the strong hope that, after having brought them so many miles in quest of him, he should be able to shake them off entirely.

To do so would be to have something like revenge upon them.

He resolved that no effort or ingenuity upon his part should be wanting.

But, standing quite alone in all the world as he now did—without comrades, without Maud, without Black Bess as well—it may seem strange that he should cling to life.

One would have thought that, on the contrary, he would have found life insupportable.

There was, in good truth, an aching void in his heart, but he clung to life because he had a purpose to accomplish.

There was an object before him upon which his mind was ever fixed.

There was a constant yearning of his spirit.

Always in his mind's eye he could see the scenery around Maud's last resting-place.

His throat would swell and ache when he thought of her, but his fixed determination was to get to the coast, embark in a vessel, and make his way to the little French village.

So paramount was his determination that all things bowed beneath it.

In times past it was rarely that he fixed his mind upon any object without securing it, and it remains to be seen whether his former success had or had not deserted him.

He last remembered being busy with these thoughts, and then all at once he was sensible of some kind of jerk.

For full a moment his brain was in confusion.

After that it seemed tolerably certain that he had unconsciously fallen off into a sleep, which might have endured much longer had it not been for the stopping of the waggon.

His sleep, too, must have been a long one, for, to his astonishment, he found that it was now almost dark.

Luckily, his presence of mind was great enough to enable him to remain perfectly still.

He could hear voices around him, and was very curious to know where he could be.

Had he reached the end of his journey?

If so, the waggon would be unloaded, and how was he to escape discovery?

He recoiled.

His first discovery was that the waggon had been drawn into a yard at the side of an inn.

The waggoner, assisted by an ostler, was unharnessing the horses.

"This is some halting-place," he muttered—"his journey is not over yet. What shall I do next?"

At present he was pretty well occupied in watching the movements of the men.

It was quite possible that the waggoner might take it into his head to peep inside his waggon to see whether all was right, and if he did, an alarm would immediately ensue.

At that lonely spot, and so far from York, it was questionable whether he would be recognised; but then Dick's wish was not to leave any sort of clue whatever behind him.

The two men led the horses into the stable, and Dick speedily took steps to prevent himself from being seen.

There was no one visible, and so with all possible alacrity and noiselessness he alighted.

When he set foot to earth he did not pause, but turned suddenly the angle of some building and walked on.

What should be his next step?

He was tolerably well provided with money for immediate use, and once thought of walking towards the inn and remaining there.

But a second thought induced him to abandon this intention.

He was not far enough from York to render it safe to show himself; besides, he had come altogether by the high-road, so that it would be easy to follow him so far.

Above all, after the description given by Skellum, the waggoner might recognise him.

A better course he imagined would be to make his way on foot across the country.

With this intention he crossed a stile and walked rapidly along a footpath leading across the fields.

Almost at every step he went the obscurity increased.

"I ought to make good use of the night," he said to himself. "Such darkness as this is the most effectual cover for my flight. I will try to keep on till daylight,

and then I will avail myself of the first place of shelter that offers."

But in coming to this decision he quite overlooked his present exhausted state.

The ride in the waggon had rested him a great deal, it is true, but he wanted a better repose than that.

Before he had walked far he felt a dreadful feeling of weariness come over him, and, strive as he would, he could not shake it off.

He tried bravely, and walked on with great resolution, but fatigue asserted itself to be his master.

He was obliged to succumb to it.

He would do no more, however, than fling himself on the ground for a brief space.

Then rising, he went on.

But he began to think this unusual exhaustion was attributable more to the length of time he had gone without partaking of food than any other cause.

Yet in the lonely, desolate situation where he now found himself, where was he to find refreshment?

But the hope of shortly finding some solitary dwelling infused a transitory vigour into his limbs.

It was only transitory, however, for it was not long before he found himself utterly incapable of going any further.

By this time the moon had risen, and although she had not attained any considerable elevation above the horizon, yet he was able to see a little about him.

His eyes had been, for some time fixed upon a dark mass in front of him, which he now made out to be a building of some kind.

Hope whispered to his heart that it might be a cottage, the inhabitants of which would afford him the food and shelter of which he stood so much in need.

But there was no ray of light to be perceived to lend any colour to this anticipation.

On the contrary, the building appeared to be lonely, solitary, deserted.

Still, whatever its character might be, it promised to afford the fugitive a better shelter than the bare sky.

Accordingly, he slowly dragged his weary limbs towards it.

As he drew nearer and became able to see it with more distinctness, hope died away within him.

It became evident that the building was merely a barn, or some such place.

Yet its roof promised some shelter, and he held on his course.

But when at last he reached the building, Dick felt that had it been much further off he must have abandoned the thought of gaining it.

As it was, a fresh disappointment awaited him.

Upon becoming aware of the nature of the place, he thought at least that there could be no difficulty in gaining admission to it.

On arriving, though, he found that the huge folding doors were so securely fastened that he could not break them open.

With a heavy sigh he sank down.

For some time he remained thus, utterly dejected, but the intense cold and discomfort of his situation made him resolve to make a fresh attempt to gain the shelter of the building.

By this time he had regained a little strength, so he rose and walked round the walls.

Only one opening presented itself, but this was so high up that he feared he should not be able to reach it.

It was an aperture similar to that which may be seen in the wall of a loft over a stable.

Against the wall, however, a tree was growing, and if it was only strong enough to bear his weight he fancied he might succeed.

At any rate he showed himself willing, for he made the attempt.

By dint of much exertion he climbed up into the branches, which bent dangerously beneath him, but did not break.

Higher—higher still he crawled, until, after twenty ineffectual attempts, he succeeded in forcing himself through the opening.

He found below him a quantity of straw, on to which he stepped with caution, for upon his first entrance the interior seemed pitch dark.

Very soon, however, his eyes accustomed themselves to the small amount of light there was in the place.

Crawling cautiously forward a little, he found that the building was furnished with an upper floor like a loft.

Here then he made sure he should be able to repose himself for any length of time he thought fit.

Certainly the doors were fast, and no one could enter without his having due notification of it.

So far, then, all was as well as could be expected.

Sighing heavily, he once more extended himself at full length and closed his eyes.

A state of semi-consciousness succeeded.

It was not sleep, and yet something wonderfully like it.

The fact was that he suffered as much, perhaps more, from want of food than any other cause.

Since leaving Drury Lane, now about four-and-twenty hours ago, he had tasted nothing but brandy.

The immense quantities of the stimulant of which he had partaken doubtless had the effect of rendering him insensible to the pangs of hunger, but for all that it had failed to supply proper nourishment, hence this terrible prostration.

How long he might have remained in the state we have described he knew not, yet fancied it could not have been long, when he heard something like a human voice.

He started up at once, and listened intently.

Wearily as he was, all his faculties were at full stretch, and his apprehension of danger morbidly acute.

Yet on this occasion his sharpened senses would seem to have played him false.

Although he listened so intently, he could hear nothing.

Believing at length that some accidental sound had misled him, he was about to resume his former position, when he felt certain he heard the sound of footsteps.

This time there could be no sort of doubt upon the point.

His first act was to draw his pistols.

It seemed scarcely possible that his foes should be approaching, but yet they had shown themselves so often in places where they were least expected, that he strongly felt the necessity of being on his guard.

He cocked his weapons, and scarcely was the operation finished when the footsteps ceased.

The murmur of voices then followed, and although Dick could not distinguish what was said, in consequence of the suppressed tones in which the conversation was carried on, yet he was confident that the speakers were close at hand.

A moment afterwards he heard a rattling noise.

It was caused by a key being thrust hastily into a lock, as though some one was full of impatience to gain admission.

But this impatience in effect only produced delay, for the key would not act properly upon the wards.

A cry of angry vexation followed.

Then the door was pushed open.

A cool rush of night air came in.

There was a square hole in the flooring of the loft, doubtless made for the purpose of facilitating the storing or removing whatever the loft might contain.

Dick was at the edge of this opening, looking down.

The opening of the one half of the huge doors by which Dick had vainly attempted to gain an entrance to the building brought to view the forms of two persons.

Dark as it was, their figures were clearly distinguishable against the night sky.

At the very first glance, Dick's apprehensions vanished, and he restored his pistols to his pockets.

But his curiosity was instantly inflamed, for one of these two persons was a female, and so far as the obscurity would allow him to judge, a young one.

Her companion was a short, thick-set, muscular-looking man, and the first words he said were:

"Now, Jane, why don't you come in?—what do you stand there for like that, dilly-dallying? Come in, I say!"

The tones of his voice were rude and harsh, and his speech was caused by a reluctance or rather disinclination on the part of his companion to enter the gloomy building.

"Oh, Stephen," she said, at length, in a trembling, tear-

ful voice, "I feel so frightened—so terribly afraid—I feel that I shall die if ever I go in there!"

The man started slightly, but recovered his self-possession almost instantly as he said:

"Die, Jane? What do you mean?"

"Don't be cross with me—pray don't! I am nervous!"

"But what do you mean by talking about dying?" he replied, if anything, with additional fierceness.

"Mean, Stephen?"

"Yes, mean!"

"N—nothing—I am only so frightened!"

"But what have you to be frightened of? Ain't I here to protect and take care of you?"

"Yes, yes—I know you are, and I am very, very foolish—I know I am very foolish; but I cannot help it."

"Well—well, come in—let's have no nonsense! You ought to know by this time that you ought not to be afraid to go anywhere if I am with you."

He took her by the arm.

Her fear of exciting his anger seemed to be greater than her dread of entering the building, for she suffered him to lead her in passively.

"There," he cried, "what have you to be afraid of, I should like to know? The place is rather dark, to be sure; but, then, what matters that? It is safe—quite safe. We may be sure of being able to remain here without anyone interrupting us, for, to my knowledge, not a soul has been here these twelve months."

The girl was silent.

"Here," continued the man, "sit down and rest yourself upon this straw—then you will soon be better."

She acquiesced, but it was with a heavy sigh, as though a trouble of no ordinary character weighed her down.

Her companion assumed an attitude of listening, and Dick Turpin immediately held his breath, lest that slight sound should be detected, for though he was certain he had nothing to fear from these new-comers, yet he by no means wished to be discovered by them.

"Can you hear anything, Stephen?" asked the girl, noticing his attitude, and speaking in consternation.

"I thought I did; but I will go and see, and make sure, directly."

"No—no. You must not leave me! I—"

"Hush! I say. Are you sure you did all that I told you, Jane? I have not had the chance of questioning you before."

"Yes," was the reluctantly-spoken answer.

"That is well, then. You are quite sure?"

"Yes, quite."

"And is there much money?"

"Enough—enough—surely enough. Oh, Stephen, when I think what a doubly-guilty being I have become, I feel as though I should sink into the earth with horror."

"Then don't think of it—that's all I can say," was the rejoinder, accompanied by a boisterous laugh.

"Oh don't—don't, Stephen. If you had seen them as I saw them, you could not help thinking of it. I shall see my poor parents to my dying day, sleeping the sleep of innocence, while I, their guilty, trembling child, purloined the bag which contained the savings of so many years, and which they wholly relied upon for the future."

"Stop—stop, I say: I won't listen to it!"

"Then if you won't listen to it, why did you urge me to commit so dreadful a crime? Oh, Stephen," she added, with a wild and passionate outburst of grief, "I shall never—never be happy again!"

"Nonsense—nonsense: you will soon forget this—I tell you you will. And you are sure you have the money?"

"Yes, Stephen—yes."

There seemed to be great anxiety upon the man's part to be assured in this respect.

Dick could not fail to notice it, and he fancied that the girl observed it too.

But if so, she did not venture to make any remark upon the subject.

The man was silent for a moment or so, and then in an altered voice, as though he was struggling to restrain some violent emotions, he said:

"Now, Jane, I want you to listen to what I am going to say, and to pay particular attention to it; do you hear?"



[THE HAULT OF THE OFFICERS ROUND THE TREE IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS HIDDEN.]

"Yes," she answered, through her tears.

"In order that our flight may be a successful one, and that no clue be left behind, it is necessary that you should remain here a little while, during which I shall go away to complete the arrangements."

"No—no!" she said, wildly and appealingly. "Don't ask me to stop here alone—that is, not alone, for I shall have my guilty conscience with me! Don't ask me to stop! I cannot—indeed I cannot!"

"But you must!" he cried, struggling to release himself from her strong detaining grasp. "It is imperative! Don't anger me, for I am in no good humour—things have not gone as I thought. Beware how you anger me! Let me go, I say! It is useless for you to try to dissuade me."

CHAPTER MCIV.

DICK TURPIN IS THE SPECTATOR OF A TERRIBLE CRIME WHICH HE IS TOO LATE TO PREVENT.

SPEAKING these last words, he broke rudely from her, and the girl, clasping her hands over her face, crouched down in the straw, shaking with grief.

"Don't be long, then," she moaned—"don't be long! If you are, you will find me dead on your return."

"Foolish thing, you know that I shall be only a few minutes at the most. Remain where you are—don't stir till I come back. If you do—if I find that you have been to the door during my absence, I will leave you to your fate and take my flight alone. Do you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Why don't you answer, then? I am going now—remember what I have said."

...saying, he quitted the building, taking care to close the door after him, though he did not fasten it. The sound of his footsteps could be heard a little while, but soon they died away, and then all was silence. Silence and darkness too.

It was now no longer possible for Dick to make out the form of the young girl, save by means of his imagination.

She did not stir, but remained crouching down among the straw, sobbing as though her heart must break.

Dick was much interested in what had taken place, but at present could not see his way quite clear in the affair.

That there was some villany about he felt convinced.

Everything in the man's manner and conduct pointed to this fact.

The mere fact of his leading his companion to so solitary a place at such a late hour was enough to give rise to the strongest suspicion.

What his object could be in leaving the girl where she was defied Dick's conjectures altogether.

That he left her for the purpose mentioned he did not for one moment believe, and he therefore awaited his return with nearly as much impatience and anxiety as Jane herself.

What seemed to him a long time elapsed—how long he could not profess to tell, for under such conditions it is difficult to keep note of the flight of time.

During this interval many thoughts passed through his mind.

He was certain that the girl was in danger, without suspecting it, and consequently felt that she ought to be put upon her guard.

But, then, he was well aware that she was in a state of excessive nervous agitation, and any attempt to attract her attention would doubtless fail, so much would she be overcome with terror.

He was busy thinking of some means by which he could do this, when his ear caught the sound of returning footsteps.

The young girl heard them, too, for she started up.

The chance now was lost.

To utter a warning was impossible, for the footsteps paused just outside the door.

Then, without any appreciable lapse of time the door was flung open, and the man appeared.

With a hysterical cry the girl bounded towards him.

Dick saw him shrink back a pace and raise his hand.

He thought at once the rascal intended to strike her a cowardly blow.

But there was a flash, a report, a shriek, a crash, all seemingly mingled together, and the young girl was next seen lying motionless, with her body half across the threshold of the building.

After the accomplishment of his crime, the man stood for a moment or so as though stupefied.

Dick himself was taken by surprise.

He had believed from the first that some crime had been meditated, but the deed had been done so suddenly as to deprive him of all power of saving her.

The highwayman was the first to recover the use of his faculties.

So great was his horror that he forgot all about his own fatigue and weakness in the strong desire he had to seize the murderer.

To drop down from through the hole in the floor, through which he had made his observations, was an easy enough matter.

The man, hearing a sound within that building wren, to the best of his knowledge, was untenanted by any living soul, started; but his fear seemed too great to allow him to run away.

The next instant Dick Turpin stood before him.

"Villain!" he cried. "I have been a witness to your crime, nor will I leave you until you are made prisoner!"

With a howl of dismay the assassin gave a great bound, then turned and fled.

Dick made an ineffectual attempt to capture him.

His finger-nails broke against the ruffian's shoulder, but the grasp was missed.

Dick, however, instantly started off in pursuit.

It would seem, however, that the sound made by the discharge of the pistol had been heard, and had caused an alarm, for not far off across the fields, twinkling lights could be seen and the hum of voices heard.

Dick shouted out at the top of his voice.

The man, seeing this fresh danger in front, changed his course.

But in doing so his foot caught violently against some obstacle which he had failed to notice.

The consequence was, that in spite of a vigorous effort to save himself, he fell sprawling on the ground.

Before he could rise the people with the lights arrived upon the scene.

Many strong hands were laid upon him, and he was forced to rise.

Dick arrived immediately afterwards, and at first—no doubt in consequence of the disordered state of his apparel—he was looked upon with considerable suspicion.

But these suspicions were quickly found to be ill-grounded.

"It be Stephen Phillips. I told you it wor," said a voice; "and when I say a thing agen, perhaps you'll believe me."

"My daughter—my Jane—my poor girl!" ejaculated an old man, with trembling accents. "This is the serpent that has lured her from her peaceful home. What has he done with her—where is she?"

"I believe I can answer those questions," replied Dick. "She has been foully murdered by that rascal, and you will find her weltering in her blood."

"Where—where?" asked a dozen voices.

"On the threshold of yonder building."

"Keep him secure," said some one, in an authoritative tone. "On no account let him get loose."

After this there was a general move towards the highwayman's late place of shelter.

As he had said, they found the poor girl lying on the threshold in a pool of blood.

But she was not quite dead.

The appearance of so many people around her, and the glare of light, brought her fluttering spirit back to life again.

With a wild burst of grief her father flung himself down beside her, and raised her head.

"Jane—Jane!" he cried. "My only one—my dear one! Look up—look up! Live—live! and all will be forgiven!"

Tears rolled down her cheeks, and as she shook her head mournfully, she said:

"I do not deserve this—I do not deserve it! It goes to my heart like a keen knife! You do not know half the extent of my deep guilt."

"Were it ten times as great it is forgiven. Are you not my daughter? But as for the wretch who has brought you to this, I will hunt him to the death—I will show him no mercy! The bitterest curses of a broken-hearted father be upon him!"

"Hush—hush! Say no more. Forgive him, as I do."

The last words were very faintly uttered.

By the light of the lanterns it could be seen that a terrible change had come over her pallid countenance.

All knew it to be the herald of death.

The frantic grief of her father was now terrible to witness.

He called upon her by a thousand endearing names; he even assured her that her villainous lover should be exempt from his just resentment.

But all was in vain.

Death would not be cheated of his prey; and with faintly-whispered words of contrition and self-accusation on her lips, the young girl expired.

By this time Dick found that there was a village not far off, and that the whole of the inhabitants of it had been aroused, and were hastening to the spot.

To attempt concealment was now useless, and, therefore, he stood forward boldly and as though he had nothing whatever to dread from being seen.

As may be expected, he was overwhelmed with questions, to which he was able to return satisfactory replies.

The next proceeding was to put together a rude kind of bier, on which poor Jane was tenderly placed.

The whole party then proceeded to the village.

Dick accompanied them.

He had been seen, and such being the case, he felt he might as well take all the advantage of it that he could.

Nearly indeed was he in need of proper rest and refreshment, and now he had the chance of obtaining both.

The body of poor Jane was carried to the home of her heart-stricken parents, while her murderer, Stephen Phillips, was secured, bound, and placed in the village cage.

Dick made his way to the inn, which seemed now to be the rendezvous of everyone.

Here he had no difficulty in obtaining all he wanted.

He observed that many looked doubtfully upon him when he stated that he had sought a night's lodging in the old barn, but they were very far indeed from suspecting his identity.

At length he retired to the chamber which had been prepared for him.

Locking the door and placing his weapons in readiness for instant use, he flung himself upon the bed.

Sleep visited him almost instantly; and in spite of all the dangers by which he was beset, no one on that night slept sounder than the highwayman.

He awoke just as it was beginning to grow light.

There was a confused feeling about his brain which lasted for some time.

Recollecting at length all that had occurred, he rose and looked out.

He found there was just beneath his window a sloping shed, and beyond that a small garden bounded by a low hedge.

No sooner did he observe this than he resolved to take his departure.

He was now altogether refreshed and rested, and quite ready for anything which might occur.

If he stayed at the inn during the day he would be no doubt subjected to a close scrutiny; besides, the intelligence of the murder might have the effect of bringing to the place some officials who, from the widely-circulated descriptions of his person, might recognise him.

Moreover, there was the chance now of going without anyone noticing the direction taken.

This was decisive; but first of all he gave his attention to making what alterations he could in his costume and general appearance.

With the aid of water and a brush he effected a considerable change in a short space of time.

Certainly if by chance seen by anyone, he would by no means attract that amount of observation which he would have done in his former disordered, travel-stained state.

"I have a better chance now," he muttered, as he completed his preparations. "I shall be no longer the conspicuous object I have been. This guinea will well recompense the landlord for all I have had."

As he spoke, he placed upon the table the coin he had just mentioned.

Then, cautiously and noiselessly, opened the window.

To Dick, the passing through this aperture was a matter of little difficulty.

The roof below was covered with ridged red tiles, so that it was comparatively easy to descend in silence and safety.

Then, when he dropped, the soft garden mould upon which he alighted gave forth no sound.

He paused a moment in a crouching position, in order to make sure that no one was near.

All appearing quite safe, he rose, and made his way swiftly along the gravel path.

The hedge at the end of the garden was cleared easily, and he pushed on as fast as possible across the fields, so as to place plenty of space between himself and the inn he had just left.

He did not pause until he had gone a couple of miles.

Looking scrutinisingly around, he failed to perceive either a human being or a dwelling.

A feeling of triumph filled his heart.

"I have eluded them!" he cried, with exultation. "I have had my revenge. They will have to ride back to London empty-handed. It would be a great triumph if they captured me; but they have failed—ha, ha!—yes, they have failed!"

This belief elated Dick considerably; but he was soon reminded of the proverb which advises everybody not to halloo before they are out of the wood.

The change that came over him was remarkable.

All at once he dropped flat to the ground, and remained there motionless as a stone.

Just when he had finished speaking, he observed a body

of horsemen emerge from a thick belt of trees, which had up to that moment entirely concealed them from his sight.

He knew at the very first glance that these horsemen were police officers.

What could have brought them to this spot was beyond his power to conjecture.

Nor was he at all certain that they had not seen him.

Several minutes elapsed, during which he endured no ordinary amount of anxiety.

At last his surprise grew to such a pitch that he was compelled to raise his head a little and reconnoitre.

His foes did not appear until he had assumed almost an erect position.

Their backs were now turned to him, and they seemed to be making their way towards the inn Dick had so recently quitted.

"Have I such good reason as this to congratulate myself upon having taken this determination? Are they about to seek me there? Can they have learned that some one answering to my appearance was at the scene of murder last night? It may be so—it may be so."

He watched the retiring police officers until they had disappeared from view.

Then, turning round, he again made his way as swiftly as he was able across the open country.

"I was congratulating myself a little too soon," he said. "I made certain that by this time they had abandoned the pursuit. But they must have heard of me by some means or other, and no doubt are now fully impressed with the belief that they will find me at the inn."

Dick had good cause for congratulation, as, if the officers had really discovered him at the village public-house, his chances of getting away would have been slight indeed.

"If I only knew which way to take to reach the sea-coast at the nearest point," he exclaimed, as, having ascended a hill he looked around him in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of the blue waters. "I cannot be far from the coast, that is certain. The question is, in which direction does it lie?"

Again he glanced around him, but he was not able to catch sight of anything that would help him to solve this question.

"Chance must for the present be my guide," he said, at length. "It will not do to stay here—I must keep in motion; and I will take my course at random until I find some means of discovering the right way."

Dick was quite right when he said it would not do for him to remain long in one place—it was only by keeping continually in motion that he should be able to avoid his foes.

In good truth, however, he had nothing but chance for a guide, the part of the country he was now in being one to which he was an utter stranger.

The only thing was that he took care to go so that the officers were at his back.

The day might now be said to have begun, and already Dick had come a considerable distance without, as he believed, having left one single clue behind him by which he could be followed.

Up to the present moment, in consequence of the earliness of the hour, he had been able to avoid being seen by anyone.

But now that the period had begun when labour would commence, his chances of doing so much longer were slight indeed.

A rest would have been agreeable, but he kept on his way, all the time being keenly on the look-out for the appearance of anyone.

He was also watching for some place where he could conceal himself during the busiest portion of the day, when the chances of meeting with people would be the greatest.

It was long, however, before any place presented itself.

Chance led his footsteps past what he had thought at first to be a stack of bricks, but which upon a closer inspection turned out to be a brick-kiln.

It was situated in the midst of a large space of ground.

As the walls would offer at least a temporary shelter,

be resolved to stay for a few minutes at any rate and rest himself.

It was not long, however, before he came to the determination to stop there if possible till nightfall, for upon looking around he perceived many indications that a long time had elapsed since any fires had been lighted or men worked there.

A slight drizzling rain began to fall, which added much to Dick's discomfort; but it had one advantage—it doubtless served to keep all those persons indoors except such as were compelled to be abroad.

Probably this was the reason that Dick never once caught sight of a human being, although his vigilance was unceasing.

So soon as ever distant objects began to grow obscure and dim, he quitted his hiding-place and took his way in the direction that he had all along been pursuing.

Vainly, however, did he look around him for an indication of what he sought.

The rain now had ceased, and although it could not be said that night had actually commenced, yet in the eastern sky a glimpse of the rising moon could be obtained.

There was indeed every prospect that the night would be a fine one, and that he would have the advantage of the moon's rays to direct his footsteps.

The sharp pangs of hunger ere long made themselves felt, and Dick knew well enough that unless the demands of Nature were complied with he should stand but a poor chance of escaping from his foes.

But the difficulty was, how could he procure what he required without being seen?

The evil seemed unavoidable.

He was pondering upon it, when a collection of houses, so small as scarcely to be worthy of the name of village, presented itself a short distance in advance.

He could not resist making his way towards it, despite the manifest risk of so doing; but, then, he knew that this was the only chance he had of appeasing his hunger.

As he approached the houses he quickened his pace.

The first place which presented itself was the village inn.

Wistful indeed was the hasty glance he gave through the uncurtained window.

He caught sight of a comfortable-looking room lighted up by the ruddy beams of a huge fire.

Dick sighed, and passed on.

At one other house only was a lighted window perceivable, and in this the illumination proceeded solely from a tallow candle placed close to the green-hued lattice panes.

This Dick discovered to be one of those miscellaneous establishments indigenous to every village.

There was scarcely any article they did not keep in stock; the window itself was crammed with a truly heterogeneous mass of goods.

Dick paused a moment, as though half inclined to enter and purchase what he wanted; but before he could make up his mind his ear caught an approaching footstep, which warned him to be cautious.

The footstep was coming from the direction he was taking.

A meeting with a person, no matter who, was of all things what he most wished to avoid, yet how was he to help it in the present instance?

There was no time either for consideration, as the newcomer was close at hand.

After a moment's thought, Dick drew back to the wall contiguous to the window of the little shop, that being the spot cast into the deepest shadow.

He pressed himself close against the wall, and waited for the pedestrian to pass by, trusting to remain unseen himself if he kept quite still.

Directly afterwards he caught sight of a boy in a smock frock, who carried in one hand a basket.

The shop appeared to be his destination, for he pushed open the door and entered.

Dick seized the opportunity to move on.

Famished as he was, however, he could not nerve himself to go very far away from the shop.

He paused irresolutely, wondering what stratagem he could put into execution that would serve his purpose.

He was interrupted in his ruminations by seeing the boy emerge.

He came forwards with a lounging gait.

"Perhaps," muttered Dick, "I may be able to get from him what I want; and surely in this obscurity he will not be able to see me very well. I will try it."

Dick stood still, and waited for the boy to come up to him, when he intended to ask him for something out of his basket.

Dick stepped forward somewhat suddenly

"My boy—" he said.

But he had no time to say any more.

With a yell of terror, the boy dropped his basket and ran off as though he had seen a ghost.

"Coxfounds him!" said Dick. "What does he mean by that? Surely he could not have been frightened at seeing me? And yet that must be it. No matter, let us see what is in the basket."

Dick stooped and picked it up; but did not stop to examine the contents for fear that the boy's claustrous should have aroused the villagers.

Once more he struck off across the country; and, coming presently to a quiet spot, he paused to make an examination.

"What a fool the boy must have been," he muttered. "If he had stayed I would willingly have given him the worth of the basket and its contents ten times over."

Dick said no more, for he found bread, butter, cheese, and other articles, with which he thoroughly succeeded in appeasing his hunger.

He saved a portion also, which he resolved to carry with him in readiness for another meal.

The basket he flung away, and having done so, he recommenced his journey in better spirits.

He came at length to some wooden palings, which stretched themselves before him like a wooden barrier.

The wood of which they were composed was old and quite covered over with moss.

"This is the boundary of some gentleman's estate," he thought; "and there is no knowing how far I may go before I reach the end of the fence. I will keep straight on at all risks; perhaps, too, in these private grounds I may be safe."

Without further delay Dick cleared the palings.

He pushed his way through a kind of cover or preserve, which, owing to the branches being nearly stripped of leaves, by no means looked so dense as it did ordinarily.

But if this was a disadvantage so far as concealing him from observation went, yet it enabled him to make his way more readily through the mass of luxuriant underwood which, in the summer-time, formed a dense entanglement among the trunks.

In his course the highwayman disturbed nothing save a few pheasants and other birds of a similar kind, which flew heavily around his head.

Emerging at length from the plantation, he came to open ground, which again was skirted by woodland.

Suddenly the deep silence which had prevailed for so long was broken by a sound, to which Dick listened with all his ears.

It was the chiming of bells.

Well did he remember the last occasion when he had heard such sounds, and a feeling of so much loneliness and desolation came over him at the reminiscence, that for a time he was quite unmanned.

Still he counted the strokes borne to his ears upon the gentle night breeze.

"Ten o'clock!" he ejaculated at length, when the chiming sounds had ceased—"ten o'clock! The hour is getting late, and I am, I fear, much farther from where I want to be than I imagined. I am terribly afraid that I have made an awful mistake—that in some way or other I have doubled upon my course. How I have done so I know not. One thing is certain: I ought to be many, very many miles away from York; and yet I never made a greater mistake in my life if those are not the bells of old York Minster that I have just heard."

If this was the case, he must indeed have doubled strangely upon his course.

"It cannot be," he said, again—"I will not believe it. Some village clock close by must have deceived me by having a similar jingle—I must be miles and miles from York."

But Dick said this more with the delusive idea of being able to stultify his own mind than because he really thought it.

His ear was an accurate, well-educated one, and it was always sufficient if he heard a sound once to know it a second time.

Could it have deceived him in this instance?

The question was one not easily decided, and so, after pausing a little longer in irresolution, he continued as before.

He had not advanced a dozen yards, however, before he found himself confronted by a stone wall—probably forming the opposite boundary of the grounds he had been crossing.

Here he paused and pressed his hand to his brow like one trying to call back something to his recollection.

"It is odd, indeed," he presently exclaimed, "if I have not somewhere seen this wall before—the only question is, where? Can it have been—Yes—yes, it must be so!"

All at once he had remembered that it was close to a stone wall that his priceless mare, Black Bess, had fallen in the agonies of death; then he had dragged her through an iron gate, and covered her with leaves.

Could he be near this spot?

Had some strange fatality directed his footsteps to this spot?—was he now within a few paces of where Black Bess was lying calmly and tranquilly in death?

Or was he misled by some chance resemblance? for to a great extent all such stone walls are alike.

He would have been more inclined to the latter supposition, had he not heard the bells.

If upon climbing up and looking over he should find the high-road on the other side, the coincidence would be more than strange.

He determined, however, not to remain long in perplexed doubt upon this point, especially as it was one that could be so easily resolved.

By the aid of a contiguous tree he quickly gained the summit of the wall.

At the first glance he saw that the high-road was indeed beneath him, and so far as he could judge by that imperfect light, the road leading from London to York.

It was a matter of great importance that he should be quite certain whether this was really the case or not; and at the same time an irresistible desire came over him to look once again if possible upon the form of his matchless steed, for even now he could scarcely realise that she was no more—that she would never carry him again.

CHAPTER CXXV

THE OFFICERS AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE ASSISTANCE OF A COUPLE OF BLOODHOUNDS TO DISCOVER DICK TURPIN.

"If it should really happen," said Dick Turpin, "that I have been really brought back so strangely to my mare's last resting-place, not one word of repining or regret shall escape my lips. Indeed, I shall be rather inclined to rejoice at the chance, for, now I come to think of it, I shamefully ill-treated and then deserted her."

His voice shook so that he could no longer speak.

"What though I rode to York in so short a time—what though the feat be deemed by all an unparalleled one—what though we are ever after remembered through it? Will that bring back my noble steed—the only tie that I had left upon the earth? Bah! this is idle talk! I will cease—yes, I will cease at once!"

He sat still for some moments on the wall.

He was beginning to see more clearly now.

Bitterly indeed did he reproach himself for the past; and the mere fact that those regrets were so entirely vain as they were, only gave additional poignancy to his deep sorrow.

He knew now the hollowness and mockery of Fame. He himself was an example of how it would lead men on to extraordinary achievements; but now that he had accomplished that which in the prospect had looked so tempting to his eyes, he experienced nothing but disappointment and desolation, instead of the triumph and satisfaction that he believed awaited him.

"But I will not desert you, Bess," he suddenly broke out. "If instead of being near to your last resting-place I am fifty miles from it, I will know no rest until I have made my way there. You shall at least receive something like a decent burial at my hands. It is the only

thing which I can do for you now; and slight and trifling as it may seem, yet it shall be done."

As he pronounced the last words, in accents of stern resolution, he slipped off the wall into the roadway.

"First and foremost," he continued, "I will satisfy myself as to whether I am right or wrong in my suppositions. Now I come to remember, I saw a milestone just before she dropped. If I can find that milestone I shall have no difficulty in finding her."

The anxiety he now experienced was absolutely uncontrollable.

He could not even control himself sufficiently to walk, but ran hastily forward, although he was by no means certain that he was going towards York.

He had only the remembrance of the direction from which the sound of the bells came to guide him.

That, however, was if anything a spur rather than a check upon his excitement, being well aware that, no matter which direction he took, he must of necessity ere long reach a milestone, and then all doubts would be removed.

If he had to retrace his steps through starting wrong, it was a mistake easy of rectification.

Fortunately for him, the road was clear, for just then so great was his state of excitement that it is questionable whether he would have allowed the appearance of any one to turn him aside from the immediate execution of his project.

He was quite breathless when he at length caught sight of the white milestone his eyes were so longing to behold.

Moderating his pace, and dashing from his brow the falling drops of perspiration that obscured his view, he stooped down to make out the figure denoting the number of miles.

"It ought to be a three," he said, straining his eyes; "and it is too! Yes—yes, there can be no mistake about it. How strange that I should get back here!"

Beyond all question Dick Turpin had actually made his way round to the point from which he had started.

But he positively rejoiced at the discovery, and looked out for the little iron gate.

After going a short distance he perceived it.

He increased his pace, pushed open the gate, and was soon by the side of the heap of leaves with which he had covered Black Bess.

Not a little of the anxiety which he felt was owing to his doubts as to whether her resting-place had been discovered and disturbed.

A glance showed him that he had no grounds for apprehension on this score.

The heap of leaves was just as he had left it.

A moment or two elapsed, however, before he could control himself sufficiently to put forth his hand and uncover a portion of his mare.

At length he did so.

She laid there calm and still enough—so calm that he almost envied her the freedom from all trouble which she enjoyed.

"My poor—poor Bess!" he cried, kneeling on the leaves and burying his face in his hands. "My best and most faithful of friends, you are past my aid now. No words of mine, no matter how uttered, will rouse you now. There is one thing that I can do for you, and only one, and it will go hard with me if I don't manage it."

He paused and listened.

"It was but the wind. All is calm and quiet—there is little fear that I shall be disturbed in this place. I will place you beneath the turf, my poor Bess. It is the last service I shall be able to render you. I owe you that at least. By my good-will no one shall ever learn the whereabouts of your last resting-place."

So speaking, he rose as though about to commence the task he had assigned himself.

But all at once he seemed to recollect that he had none of the tools that were indispensable to the carrying out of his intention.

For a little time this difficulty troubled him.

"Digging implements must be had from somewhere," he murmured. "I cannot do without them; and I will not abandon my design for such a trifling thing as this. But where are they to be had? Let me think—let me think."

His reflections soon took a definite shape.

"Beyond all doubt," he said, "there must be somewhere in the grounds a house or rather mansion of considerable size. It ought not to be a very hard matter to find it; and about some of the numerous outbuildings, with which it is as a matter of course surrounded, it will be strange if I don't find a few gardening tools. Then all will be easy enough. I will go now at once."

Carefully replacing the leaves he had removed, in case during his absence anyone should pass that way and ascertain what was hidden there, he quitted the spot.

It is needful, however, that we leave him for a brief space, during which we shall make the reader acquainted with a few of Mr. Skellum's movements, which it is necessary should be known.

The last mention we made of him was when Dick perceived him and his party apparently going in the direction of the inn he had just left.

Such was indeed his destination, and how it came to be so is easily explained.

In the first place, Dick Turpin was very much nearer the city of York than he had the least idea of.

Therefore the news of the murder of the young girl was transmitted very speedily, and Mr. Skellum heard of it, if anything, a little before daybreak, for he had left instructions that he should immediately be aroused if anything of an unusual character took place.

Mention of course was made of Dick, about whom, as we have already stated, there was a good deal of suspicion.

Half a word was enough for Mr. Skellum.

He jumped to the conclusion that it must be Dick in a moment.

"This is his work!" he exclaimed. "I will lay ten thousand pounds of it! Be quick! If he is at the inn we shall be sure to have him!"

No time was lost in getting ready for a start, and, having had the position of the little village accurately described to him, Mr. Skellum resolved to make his way to it by the nearest cut.

This, then, is how it happened that Turpin saw him while making his way across the open country.

Upon arriving at the inn, of course he found, to his infinite chagrin, that the bird had flown; and, moreover, there were so many versions of the affair that he scarcely knew what to believe.

He also found that in one point at least he had been mistaken.

The murder had been none of Dick's work, as he had so positively stated it to be, for the coward Stephen, the very first thing in the morning, made a full confession of his guilt.

Finding himself wrong where he felt so convinced he was right, naturally shook Mr. Skellum's faith in other matters.

Nevertheless, an immediate search was instituted for the person who it was agreed on all hands had slept at the village inn and disappeared.

But Dick had been very careful not to leave a track by which he could be followed; and the police officers, having nothing but the acuteness of their own perceptions to guide them, as a matter of course rode off in precisely an opposite direction.

Inquiries were made, but without result.

No one answering to the description given had been seen by anybody.

Different directions were tried with no better result, until a kind of circle had been described, of which the inn was the centre.

To the place last mentioned they finally advanced, in order to breathe their horses, and also in the faint hope that they might be able to learn some news of importance.

On their arrival, Mr. Skellum found awaiting him a personage of whom most of the peasantry in the vicinity stood in no ordinary dread.

This was no other than Sir Humphrey Yeomans, an old English baronet, possessed of not a few of the prejudices and peculiarities which at that time generally belonged to those in his position.

Mr. Skellum was made acquainted with this fact by the landlord.

"Look here," he said. "Take a word of caution—what you are about—take care what you say."

"Why?" asked Skellum. "Who is he and what does he want?"

"In the first place, he is the owner of all the land and whatever is upon it for as many miles and more than you have ridden to-day, and, consequently, of no slight importance."

"He must be immensely rich?"

"I believe you; one of the richest men in England, I should say."

"And he has asked for me?"

"Have I not said so?"

"Do you know what he wants with me?"

"I believe it is to make some inquiries of you about this Dick Turpin of whom you are in search."

"Where is he?"

"Up in my best room, drinking wine, and waiting for you."

"What brings him here to-day? Does he often come?"

"He calls frequently, because, you see, this is the Yeoman's Arms."

"Yes—yes; but his business here to-day?"

"He has ridden over, I believe, in his capacity of magistrate, just to make himself acquainted with the facts of the case."

"He is a magistrate, then?"

"Yes; and no one knows what else besides. But I should advise you not to stop any longer gossiping with me, but to go up to him at once."

"I will do so; but tell me first what kind of behaviour does he generally receive—very humble, I suppose?"

"Yes—rather so."

"Likes to have his vanity flattered?"

"Oh yes."

"Enough. Lead the way; I will follow."

As the reader must have seen, Mr. Skellum was evidently a man of the world.

He always had his eyes open to every chance there was of bettering his condition; and he no sooner heard that he had been inquired for by so great a personage, than he began to wonder how he could best turn the incident to his advantage.

The cue he had received was quite enough, and he followed the landlord upstairs with a confident step.

But as soon as he was ushered into the chamber a remarkable alteration came over him.

He made a very low bow, and then stood, hat in hand, just across the threshold.

The landlord closed the door.

But Skellum, although his eyes were so cast down, had taken a tolerably good view of the baronet's appearance.

He can best be described by saying that he was an excellent specimen of a wealthy old English squire: his ruby face and claret-coloured nose standing out in remarkable contrast against his spotlessly-white wig and his portly form, clad in a garb that showed it off to admiration—a garb, which it is to be hoped, will some day again come in fashion.

Perceiving he did not speak, Mr. Skellum bowed again.

"Sit ye down, mon—sit ye down," said the baronet, pointing to a chair.

Mr. Skellum, with a little well-affected hesitation, presently complied.

We quite despair of producing upon paper the worthy baronet's peculiar vernacular, and so we will not even so much as make the attempt.

Besides, the broad Yorkshire dialect spoken a hundred years ago would scarcely be comprehended by the majority of readers now.

"I want to know something about this high-flying chap," he began, abruptly, and pushing the bottle across the table as he spoke. "Just fill up your glass and let me know all about it."

Skellum did so; and Sir Humphrey, without giving him time to commence his narrative, said:

"I suppose you are one of the Lunnon regular police officers, Mr. A—a—"

"Skellum, your worship," was the reply, given as though he was begging pardon for having a name which the baronet did not know.

"Ah! Skellum."

"I am not a regular officer, your worship; but I have been sent out as a special agent from the Government to break up and abolish the gangs of robbers that have been the terror of all travellers for so long."

"And very right too."

"I may venture," said Skellum, in a humble, modest way, "to say that I have been tolerably successful. Out of four of the most desperate of these highwaymen only one remains."

"You captured the others?"

"In a strict manner of speaking, your worship, I did not capture them; but I brought about their destruction, which is the same thing."

"Just so—just so. And they are all dead?"

"Yes. And ere long the one who has given me more trouble than all the rest of the lot put together will be in the hands of the authorities."

"Good—good—very good!" assented the baronet, spreading out his hands and warning them, while he reclined at his ease in the most comfortable chair the inn possessed.

"D—n all such varmint, say I; and if I had got them to deal with, I should make short work of them. The authorities are a d—d sight too particular and lenient, that's my opinion! There ought to be no ceremony shown to such wretches; no, nor poachers either."

"You are quite right, your worship, and I make bold to say those are exactly my sentiments."

The baronet was quite pleased to find his opinion so cordially shared in by one he firmly believed to be a special Government agent, and to whom in consequence he was prepared to show no little respect.

Mr. Skellum was invited to fill up his glass, and then the baronet said:

"But I am told that this Dick Turpin you are so anxious to catch is no ordinary rogue."

"No, that he is not."

"I have heard some impossible story about him riding one horse from London to York here in twelve hours, but of course it is not true."

"I must beg to assure you that it is true."

"True?"

"Yes, true."

"He actually did it?"

"Yes: I was witness, otherwise I should have been as incredulous as you are now."

The baronet opened his eyes to an extraordinary width, and even pushed his chair away from the fire, so great was his astonishment.

"And you mean to assure me that one horse brought a man two hundred miles in twelve hours?"

"I am ready to take my oath of it, your worship, only it was a mare and not a horse."

"I am bound to believe you, and yet it seems impossible still."

"It does."

"And what has the villain done with his mare?"

"Rode her till she dropped down dead under him on the high-road, somewhere about three miles this side of York."

"Then d—n him for a villain!" said the baronet, in great wrath.

He struck the table several heavy blows as he spoke, and also gave utterance to some other expletive that would by no means look well upon paper.

His anger somewhat surprised Mr. Skellum, who was unable to arrive at the precise reason for it.

"And you are sure the mare is dead?" was the baronet's next question.

"Yes—that is, as sure as I can be, without having seen the dead body."

"The villain—the rascal! I would have given a thousand pounds, say, two thousand—any money—for her. She was a prize, a masterpiece—worth her weight in gold! And to think that she should have the misfortune to fall into the hands of a d—d scamp like that, who could ride her to death! D—n me if that isn't the very worst crime he has ever committed!"

The baronet's indignation here became too great for sober utterance.

There could be no doubt about his thinking that Dick Turpin's treatment of Black Bess was an unpardonable atrocity.

"I'll tell you what," he cried at length, "such a scoundrel is no more fit to live than a poacher! And, Mr. Skellum, or whatever your name is—"

"Skellum, humbly begging your worship's pardon."

"Well, if you will let me join with you, I will soon make short work of the d—d vagabond—that I will!"

"I shall be very happy, your worship, if you would only be kind enough to give me your valuable advice and assistance."

"You shall have them, d—m me—you shall have them! Here, have another glass, and I'll have another, for this d—d business sticks in my throat! The idea of murdering such a creature—yes, d—n me, it's murder and nothing less!"

Mr. Skellum could hardly yet understand the baronet's incoherence.

He did not know that Sir Humphrey prized a horse above all things in the world, and in his mind there was scarcely any crime greater than injuring one.

Sometimes he used to wonder which could be the worst, that or poaching.

"Your worship," said Mr. Skellum, after rather a long pause, "I should be glad to know what are your opinions—or, rather, what it is you thought of doing in the matter?"

"Ah—very good—you did right to remind me. But you don't drink."

"I have important business, if your worship would excuse me—"

"Tut—tut! A drop of this will only steady your nerves a little. However, as to what I was about to say."

Mr. Skellum prepared himself to be most attentive.

The baronet, before commencing, drew his chair a little nearer, as though it was his intention to be very confidential.

"You must know, in the first place, that poachers are my plague—yes, the plague of my life! I know no rest or peace for them."

"Can you not put them down?"

"I have tried, but then they get off and hide themselves—they can't be found; and then there is proving the charge. But I have got a plan against them that will put a stop to it, and help you to capture this Dick Turpin, d—n him!"

"I am most anxious to know what this plan can be, your worship."

"No doubt, and therefore I will not keep you in suspense another moment."

Mr. Skellum was, in good truth, most curious to know what the baronet was going to say.

"Look here," he began. "A friend of mine abroad has a remarkably fine breed of bloodhounds. What do you think of that?"

"Well, really, your worship—" stammered Skellum, who could not for the life of him think what this circumstance had got to do with the case.

"I see you don't catch at the idea. But I will be more explicit."

Skellum inclined his head.

"This friend of mine, then, some time ago procured me a couple of these matchless creatures, and a little while ago they arrived. They are magnificent! Their training has been everything training should or could be. At present I have made no trial of their powers; but I am assured that once placed upon the track of anyone they will never quit it."

"I have heard of such animals," said Skellum, with a disagreeable sensation pervading his whole frame; "but I have never seen one."

"You shall see mine," said the baronet, who prided himself not a little upon possessing them.

Not knowing exactly what to say, Skellum filled up the pause by bowing again, though he shivered slightly as he did so.

"Of course you guess what I had them for?"

"Well, I—"

"To get rid of the poachers."

"Ah!" responded Skellum, with a long breath.

The baronet's countenance assumed a fierce and most vindictive expression as he continued:

"Yes, for the poachers. I have been waiting for them for some time, but they have heard of the bloodhounds, and they have been scared away."

"But your worship, I suppose, merely intends to use these animals as inspirers of terror? You would not use them?"

"Yes, by — would I if I had the chance!" was the vindictive rejoinder. "The very first time I hear of any being seen I shall call out the bloodhounds, put them on the scent, and quickly track them out."

"But I have heard," said Skellum, deprecatingly and hesitatingly, "that if they happen to catch up with the person they are sent after they will tear them to pieces if some one is not at hand to call them off."

"And if they do, what then? Is it any more than a d—d rascally poacher deserves? Not a bit of it. I should like to make ~~use~~ of serving them all in the same way."

Mr. Skellum, as the reader knows very well, was neither over nice nor particular about what he did, but yet the baronet's cold-blooded manner made him shudder in spite of himself.

This bitter animosity against poachers was something he could not understand.

To him, the capture of a few pheasants or hares seemed a very trifling offence.

But it was clear that the baronet thought it one of the blackest of crimes, and the perpetrators of it not worthy of the consideration shown to human beings.

"Now look here," he went on—"these bloodhounds are just the very things you want. There will be no trouble in putting them upon the scent, because it seems pretty clear that the fellow got through the bed-room window and dropped into the garden."

Mr. Skellum wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Rely upon it they would soon find him," proceeded the baronet, "and would save you a world of trouble—perhaps prevent the fellow getting off altogether. If you are inclined to try the plan you are quite welcome; I should like to see the fun, and it would also be making a kind of trial of my dogs, which I am very anxious to do."

Mr. Skellum hardly knew what reply to make to the baronet's proposition.

We must do him the justice of stating that the idea of hunting anyone with bloodhounds was repugnant to his feelings.

Side by side with this admission, however, must be put the fact that this repugnance was not of very long endurance.

He thought about the reward and the credit he should lose if Dick Turpin was not captured.

"Besides," he said to himself, "he is only a highwayman."

Another consideration which weighed much with him was, that if he declined, the baronet would, of course, be very much offended, and Skellum felt that he could not afford to make a foe of so powerful a personage.

That clinched the matter.

"Well?" said Sir Humphrey, who had been waiting in no less impatience than surprise for Skellum to reply.

"I will be frank with your worship," he said. "At the first blush, I must say I did not care about the plan, chiefly, I suppose, because it is out of the ordinary course in which we do our business; but, upon consideration, I feel extremely anxious that it should be tried, for I don't care about telling your worship that if this fellow slips through my fingers it will be a very serious affair for me."

"Very well, then," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, rising, "I am glad we have come to a satisfactory conclusion."

"Are the dogs here?" asked Skellum, anxiously.

"Not here; but they are at the kennels. I will soon have them."

He tugged violently at the bell-pull while he spoke.

The landlord made his appearance with marvellous speed, for he knew well the impatient character of his guest.

"Send Jackson up to me," said Sir Humphrey, briefly.

The landlord bowed and retired.

There was then a silence of a minute or two's duration.

It was broken by a faint tapping at the door.

"Come in!"

"Jackson," cried the baronet, "I want you to ride over to the kennels at once, and bring the two bloodhounds. You understand?"

"Yes, your worship."

"Be off, then, and make as much haste as you can."

Jackson withdrew, and Skellum and the baronet, now the best of friends, imbibed a few more glasses of wine.

The former did indeed feel as though his nerves wanted steadying; but as for Sir Humphrey, it was clear he attached but slight importance to the act of hunting a human being in the same way as some wild animal.

He was used to hunting of various kinds, and looked upon a highwayman as no better than a poacher, and only worthy of being treated in the same manner.

At length intelligence was brought that Jackson had arrived with the dogs, and thereupon Skellum and the baronet both went downstairs.

While the latter was examining the ferocious animals, the former was getting his men together and explaining to them the nature of the unexpected aid they had received.

The men, who had begun to think that they were to have no other reward than their trouble for their pains, brightened up at this intelligence, and prepared to set about their task with more spirit and alacrity than otherwise they would have exhibited.

No time was lost in making these preparations, still a good while elapsed before all was ready.

At length the two dogs, which were securely held in slips or leashes, were taken round into the garden, just under the window through which Dick had passed.

They were long-bodied, fawn-coloured animals with massive legs and large, square heads.

Already they had been taken up into the room Dick had occupied in order that they might get familiar with the smell.

They now exhibited the utmost uneasiness and impatience—sniffing the air, howling and struggling desperately to get free from the slips in which they were held, and almost dragging Jackson away in their efforts.

"Is all ready?" asked the baronet.

"Yes, your worship," replied Skellum—"everything."

"Very good, then. Let go, Jackson."

At a touch, Jackson set free the dogs and hastily scrambled on to his horse's back.

The dogs ran round two or three times, sniffing, howling, and barking.

Then, having found the track, they started off, holding their noses close down to the ground.

"Now they are right," said Jackson. "They will find him, no matter where he is, for the track will everywhere be newer and fresher than it is here, and consequently more easy for them to follow."

"Capital—capital!" cried Sir Humphrey, entering with great ardour upon the chase.

"The only thing we have got to do," continued Jackson, "is to keep them in sight so as to be able to call them off. If we don't, they will tear the poor devil in pieces."

The horses were good and fresh, and the speed of the bloodhounds not very great, so that it was very easy to keep up with them.

Skellum and his men were much excited.

To them, the proceedings had that charm which nothing but novelty can impart.

Every motion made by the dogs was followed by them with the closest attention, and beheld with wonder.

There was a little delay occasionally, owing to the track being lost, but the dogs running on in front and careering round in circles quickly recovered it, and started off again.

Despite these delays, however, the reader will scarcely require to be informed they made much greater speed than Dick Turpin did, and consequently there was little doubt that they would ere long come up with him.

CHAPTER CXVI.

DICK TURPIN BECOMES AWARE THAT THE BLOODHOUNDS ARE ON HIS TRACK.

"I AM afraid the darkness will spoil the sport," said Sir Humphrey, in tones of vexation, as he noticed the growing obscurity. "I had no idea it was so late."

Nor had anyone else until the baronet called attention to the circumstance.

The fact was, that each and all had been so much occupied and excited by the strangeness of the events that were taking place, that they never noticed the night's approach.

It happened, too, that the daylight had been considerably prolonged, as it often is at the approach of winter when the sky is unobscured by clouds.



[DICK TURPIN CONCEALS HIMSELF IN THE GARDEN WALL.]

But no sooner had the sun set than there came a sudden darkness over the whole face of Nature without the intervention of half the usual space of twilight.

It was the night setting in thus suddenly that caused the baronet to give vent to his angry exclamation.

There was no fear, though, that on this account he would abandon the pursuit.

Jackson, however, said as much as he dared give utterance to in the shape of objection.

"We shall find it very difficult to keep the dogs in view, your worship."

"Then we must keep them in hearing," was the gruff rejoinder—so gruff that Jackson closed his mouth without daring to say another word.

Mr. Skellum looked anxious and uneasy.

He by no means relished the probability of seeing and assisting in the tearing to pieces of a fellow-creature,
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even though that fellow-creature should be a highwayman, and Dick Turpin to boot.

The baronet did not seem to be troubled with any such scruples.

Glancing towards the east, and perceiving a faint illumination in that quarter, he added:

"We shall have the moon up before long; and as there are no clouds, we shall be able to see well enough. Besides, I know every inch of the ground round the place."

He seemed also to think this quite sufficient for everybody, though Mr. Skellum and his followers were perfectly ignorant of the nature of the ground, and experienced no little difficulty in making their way across a rough, open country.

Skellum's horse stumbled twice, and on the second occasion forced a remonstrance to his lips.

"Your worship," he said, "don't you think it would

be as well, or even better, to defer the chase till daylight? In the dark no one can tell what accident may happen."

The very idea of abandoning a chase after anything when it had been once commenced, was so preposterous a one, that it fairly took his breath away, and a minute or so elapsed before he could make any reply.

"Put it off? Never! My motto is: 'Never put off.' Besides, if we waited till to-morrow the scent would grow cold, and in the meantime he might get a horse and ride away, in which case we should lose him altogether."

There was so much determination, or rather bulldog obstinacy in the tones in which Sir Humphrey spoke that Mr. Skellum, like the man Jackson, judged it expedient to remain silent.

For some time a general silence reigned.

The obscurity now was so much increased that the attention of everybody was pretty well occupied in taking care that their horses had firm level ground beneath their feet.

Suddenly, Sir Humphrey gave vent to an ejaculation of a forcible character.

"They've got him—they've got the rascal! D—d if I didn't think we should have him before very long! Come on, quick, will you!"

These remarks were called forth by the dogs setting up a terrible howling and barking; and from the nature of the sounds it was evident the creatures had come to a stop somewhere.

The baronet was quite confident that they had seized their prey, and so great was his ardour in consequence, that he speedily outrode all the rest, despite the efforts that were made to overtake him.

Mr. Skellum felt by no means so confident as the baronet; but then that will not be wondered at when it is remembered what a many times he had been disappointed.

Still, he kept up close to the rest, and quickly caught sight of what he took at first to be a cottage or barn, but which on a closer approach turned out to be a brick kiln.

He arrived just in time to see the dogs bolt off again; but there was nothing of the highwayman to be seen.

The baronet was staggered for a second or two, because he had made so very sure that the chase was over.

That such was not the case, however, was unquestionable, for the bloodhounds were once again in full cry.

The brick kiln, as the reader doubtless suspects, was the place where Dick had passed the hours of daylight.

Of course, here the scent was comparatively warm, not a very long time having elapsed since he quitted the place.

"Forward—forward!" he cried, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment. "They are in full cry now, and you may depend, after all, he is not very far off."

This, by the increased animation of the dogs, seemed to be highly probable, for they ran on and barked as though mad.

All anxiously passed onward.

Even Mr. Skellum forgot the danger of the path in the anxiety he felt lest the dogs should come up with Dick and tear him to pieces before the arrival of anyone who could call them off.

Up to the present moment they had had things all their own way, but they found themselves destined to experience a reverse.

All at once the dogs met with a fault—that is, they lost the scent; nor were they able to find it again, although the sagacious animals went round and round in wide and wider circles, in the hope of coming up with it.

The baronet fretted and fumed in a manner that on any other occasion would have been provocative of a smile.

But the present instant was too grave for smiling.

"What's the best thing to be done, Jackson?" asked Sir Humphrey.

"Well, your worship, as you know, I have not had much experience with these creatures, but I suppose the best thing will be to stop where we are until they recover the scent again. They will let us know when that takes place, you may depend."

"Yes," assented the baronet, "I suppose it will be the best to stay here, otherwise we may be riding our horses up and down here and there to no purpose."

"And we might breathe the horses a little the while,"

said Skellum. "That last bit of ploughed land has taken the steam out of mine, I can assure you."

The halt was thus agreed upon, but the baronet was too impatient and too excited to remain still very long.

Nothing would do but Jackson must ride after the dogs and observe their movements.

This was done.

Still all efforts were unavailing.

It then became the prevalent impression that he must have mounted, and so there was an end of the affair.

But the baronet was unwilling to come to this conclusion, and held out against it as long as he was able.

At last, after what seemed, to him especially, a whole age of suspenseful waiting, the deep baying of the bloodhounds made itself heard.

The sound floated over the silent meadows as though it came from a considerable distance.

"Off and away!" yelled Sir Humphrey, with a furious tally-ho!—"off and away—there, now we have him!"

The chase was now recommenced in real earnestness, and, if possible, under greater excitement than before.

Away they all went helter-skelter, with Sir Humphrey at their head, and all the rest after him like a flock of wild geese.

It is a thousand wonders several of them did not meet with serious accidents, for the ground was very rough and rugged.

The continual baying of the dogs was a tolerably good guide for them to follow, and in a short time they had the further assistance of Jackson's voice, who shouted out to them continually.

On coming up with him the noise made by the dogs was explained.

He had managed to secure them, and he now stood holding the slips just in the same way as when they left the inn.

That they had recovered the scent again was evident enough, for they almost pulled Jackson along with them in the violent attempts they made to get away.

"What is the meaning of it?" asked Sir Humphrey, as he reined up in order that the others might all come up with him. "How can they have lost the scent?"

"Easy enough, your worship; I can quite understand it."

"How is it, then?"

"Why, he must have taken to the road for some distance, and there, owing to many other people and vehicles passing over his footsteps, the scent was destroyed."

"Of course that's it," said Sir Humphrey, with an air of great satisfaction. "And this is just where he has taken to the open country again."

"Exactly so. Yonder is the lane."

Jackson pointed to a low hedge a few paces off, as he spoke.

Previously to entering the village where he had so terrified the boy that he dropped the basket of provisions he was carrying, Dick had walked along the lane, where his footsteps were obliterated.

But the dogs, by going round and round in circles in the manner we have described, had eventually come upon his trail again, though much time had been lost in doing so.

"Let go the dogs," said the baronet; and at the word the slips were unloosed.

In an instant, with guttural growls of satisfaction, the dogs bounded off.

"We must make good speed," Sir Humphrey cried, "or we shall lose them in this darkness."

It did, in good truth, require an eye of more than ordinary sharpness.

The obscurity was very great, for along with the moon clouds had arisen, and it was only occasionally through the straggling rifts that her beams reached the earth.

The dogs kept on steadily; and all at once Sir Humphrey was struck with a circumstance which he had failed to perceive before.

"May I be d—d if we are not going straight towards home, and by a nearer cut I think than ever I took before! Surely the rascal has never had impudence enough to go there?"

"He has impudence enough for anything, interjected Skellum.

"But do you think he would rob me?"

"No doubt he would if he had the chance."

"Curse the villain! Perhaps he is at the Hall now, frightening her ladyship into hysterics."

This idea, for which there was no very reasonable foundation, made the baronet's anxiety and impatience increase tenfold.

But as the pursuit was continued, it became more and more evident that they were riding direct to the Hall, for the dense belt of trees surrounding it was every now and then seen distinctly in the moonlight.

As they came nearer they saw not only the trees, but the very palings which marked the boundary, towards which the bloodhounds were careering headlong.

The baronet spurred his horse so violently that he got far ahead of the rest, though they tried hard to keep up with him.

The dogs all at once came to a stop at the foot of the palings, where for a second or two they howled dismally.

Then they ran up and down sniffing and whining.

Finally, to the surprise of the baronet, they came towards him a little way.

Then giving a spring, they cleared the high palings by a desperate effort, and immediately afterwards could be heard going at full cry through the plantation.

The baronet was so carried away by the chase, and so excited by the positive intelligence he had now got that Dick Turpin was actually on his own grounds, that he rode his horse at the fence as if with the intention of clearing it.

It was insanity to make the attempt, for not only were the palings about twice as high as a horse could be expected to leap, but there was no space of ground to alight upon on the other side, for the trees grew thickly everywhere.

The horse, however, seemed all at once to become aware of one or both of these circumstances, for he stopped short while in full career.

No event could have taken Sir Humphrey more by surprise than this, and the consequence of his unpreparation was, that he shot over the head of his horse like a rocket, and stopped against the old palings so suddenly and with so much force, that it was a wonder he did not break through altogether.

The horse seemed frightened at what it had done, and appeared as though it was about to try a bolt in the opposite direction.

At this moment, however, the others arrived; and Jackson, stretching out his hand, very adroitly seized the animal's bridle.

By the time this was done and before any assistance could be rendered him, the baronet scrambled to his feet, to all appearance being neither hurt nor confused by his terrible fall.

But then he had been canted out of the saddle more than once in his life.

"Don't stop!" he cried—"don't stop! I'm not hurt—not hurt a bit. Where's my horse? D—n it all, the fellow may be at the Hall murdering everybody!"

"The dogs are on his track, that is certain," remarked Jackson, as he assisted his master to mount. "What a racket they are making, to be sure!"

All the place was echoing loudly with the barking of the bloodhounds, and Skellum fancied that the reason was they had found their prey.

The inevitable delay caused by the incident we have just described, put him in a terrible fidget.

He was wondering, too, how the palings were to be surmounted.

But the next words spoken by Jackson relieved him on this point.

"Now, Sir Humphrey, if you will follow me, we will be after the dogs in a twinkling."

But how are we to get over the palings?"

"There is not the slightest necessity for doing so, nor for going through the plantation, since the dogs are no longer in it."

"But where the devil must we go?"

"There is a little gate in the palings a few yards below."

"A gate!" exclaimed the baronet. "I never heard of it."

"That may be; but one is there, though it is never used. It opens upon a little path, along which we can ride with ease, and so get to the other side of the park, where I take it the dogs now are."

"They seem to me closer to the Hall. But lead on and be quick."

Thus admonished, Jackson skirted the park palings, and presently stopped at a little door which, though narrow, still seemed wide enough to allow one horse at a time to pass through.

"I daresay it's fastened," Jackson cried, as he slipped from his horse; "but if your worship don't mind, I'll soon have it open with a stone."

"Open it how the devil you like so long as you are quick about it."

A large stone lay conveniently close to the gate, and Jackson, picking it up, flung it with all his might against the place where the lock might be supposed to be.

There was a crash, and the door swung back upon its hinges in a moment.

The baronet pushed through in a desperate hurry, closely followed by Skellum.

The path was bounded on both sides by dense masses of trees and shrubs, and was only just wide enough to allow of the passage of one horse at a time.

The barking of the dogs still continued, and if anything, with increased fury.

But on emerging into the open ground, the baronet and the rest were at fault for the guidance of Jackson, who knew all the intricacies of the grounds better than anyone.

The loud cries of Sir Humphrey quickly brought him in view, and he again took up a position in advance.

"I know whereabouts they are. Follow me."

Just as he pronounced the last words all were startled by the ringing report of a discharged pistol.

Before anyone had time to speak a word, this first report was followed by a second, and then, strangest of all, an absolute silence followed.

The dogs ceased their barking as if by magic, and this abrupt cessation of sound so affected all that they could do nothing else save stare in each others' faces.

The baronet was the first to recover himself.

"May I be d—d," he yelled, "if I don't believe the villain has killed the dogs! How is it they don't bark, Jackson?"

"I can't tell, your worship. Let us rush forward and see."

This was such a reasonable thing that no one hesitated a moment, especially as Jackson suited the action to the word.

Before long, however, they reached a spot where the trees grew so densely that it was quite out of the question to think of riding among them.

"We must alight here," cried Jackson, "and push through on foot. Get your arms ready in case they are wanted."

Before he had finished speaking every saddle was empty, and the riders engaged with all possible speed in securing their horses to the numerous branches around.

This done, still under the guidance of Jackson, they forced their way through the little wood, for such it seemed to be.

But there was no longer any indication to show them where the dogs were.

Jackson, however, led the way with a great deal of confidence, for he had already decided in his mind whereabouts it was he had last heard the sound.

That he was no bad judge was quickly proved, for all at once he stopped and cried out:

"Here they are!"

The others, who were a little in the rear, pressed forward, and saw a sight for which they were not altogether prepared.

Lying at the foot of a tree were the two bloodhounds.

The cause of their silence was manifest.

Each one had received a pistol bullet in the centre of the forehead, the effect of which must have been to produce instantaneous death.

Their limbs yet twitched convulsively, and the blood continued to gush from the wounds.

But what shall we say of the effect of this spectacle upon the baronet?

We fear our powers of description will altogether fail.

We may, however, state that he at first stood stock-still like one stunned with some terrible calamity.

Then for the next phase he broke out into a torrent of the most horrible invectives conceivable.

If curses could have killed Dick Turpin he would not have survived a moment.

The baronet's resentment against the highwayman was in all conscience strong enough, but the loss of his much-prized bloodhounds increased the intensity of it a thousandfold.

"D—n his blood, but I'll have the life out of him for this!" he exclaimed, after the first fury of his anger had abated. "He can't be far off——"

"No, that's certain," interrupted Jackson, who was kneeling down beside the lifeless animals; "they are quite warm yet."

"And he shall be warm before long, I'll promise him! He's about the grounds somewhere. Search well for him, and the first that finds him shall have a hundred guineas out of my pocket!"

As may be supposed, this offer produced an immediate effect, and without another word the whole of the party eagerly dispersed, searching closely in every direction.

But as they forced their way through the luxurious vegetation, all thought that a better place of concealment could scarcely exist, and therefore that their chances of finding the highwayman were small.

With an utter disregard of personal consequences, the baronet plunged among the underwood.

The skin upon his face and hands was fearfully scratched.

The clothes he wore were torn into long strips by the bramble bushes through which he urged his way.

But, regardless of these minor evils, he continued to struggle on.

To him, Dick now was worse than a thousand poachers; and he promised if he caught sight of him to favour him with the contents of a pistol first and call upon him to surrender afterwards.

Anxious moments elapsed.

A great rustling could be heard, caused by the men struggling with the low-growing branches of the trees and the dense undergrowth, but no sound was heard indicative of the fact that a discovery had been made.

And of course the more time that elapsed the more distant became the chance that they would succeed at all.

And yet there was indisputable evidence of his having been there so very recently that it scarcely seemed possible that he should have escaped.

Skellum looked upon his disappearance as most extraordinary; but he was fast reaching a point when he would have to be surprised by anything Dick might do, no matter how incredible or astounding it might appear.

Half an hour elapsed, during which the little plantation had been thoroughly searched, but without result.

It was then determined by Skellum and the baronet, who happened to encounter each other, that a consultation should be held as to their future proceedings.

The question was, how could all the men be summoned to that particular spot?

Skellum soon hit upon an expedient.

He fired a pistol.

As he expected, the report was followed by a great trampling of feet, and in a very short time indeed the whole of the troop had assembled, all being most eager to know what had happened.

Their disappointment was great so soon as they became acquainted with the actual state of affairs.

All now were of the unanimous opinion that the highwayman was not in the wood.

Had he been, they could scarcely have failed to light upon some traces of him.

"He must have made a straight rush for the stone wall and escaped," said Jackson; "I feel certain he is not here."

"Unless he should be in some of these trees."

"We should see him if he was, I fancy, for the branches have scarcely a leaf upon them."

"True," assented Skellum.

"But what's that?" exclaimed the baronet, as he raised his hand suddenly.

A faint rustling was heard.

The sound came from somewhere very close to the spot on which they stood.

CHAPTER MCXVII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN EFFECTUALLY DISPOSES OF THE TWO BLOODHOUNDS.

WE go back now to Dick Turpin.

It will be remembered that when we left him last he was about to make his way towards the Hall, in order to obtain those implements necessary to enable him to carry out his firmly-fixed intention of burying Black Bess.

He had nothing whatever to serve him as a guide as to the direction in which he ought to go.

Clearly, however, the first thing to accomplish was to get clear of the trees, which now prevented him from seeing even a yard in advance.

At length he found before him an open space, but before venturing to step upon it he remained just so far within the wood as to be well shadowed by the trees, while he proceeded to reconnoitre carefully.

The ground before him had a park-like appearance, for the grass was smooth, and here and there stood a noble-looking tree.

But although he looked most scrutinisingly around him he failed altogether to perceive the slightest indication that a human habitation was in the vicinity.

His attention was, however, soon attracted by a sound which seemed to furnish the clue of which he was so anxiously in search.

This was the loud baying of dogs.

"The house must be over there then," he muttered, looking in the direction from which the sound had come. "Those are doubtless the watch-dogs in the yard."

But scarcely had he finished speaking before he discovered that he had come to a most erroneous conclusion.

With a sudden bound he saw emerge from the trees which bounded the open space on the opposite side, two huge, fierce-looking dogs.

They were the bloodhounds.

But, unfortunately, Dick did not recognise them as belonging to this dreaded breed.

Their fierceness, however, made him resolve to abandon for the present his intention of emerging from his present place of concealment.

"There may be a keeper or some one in company with those dogs," he muttered; "doubtless there is. I will draw back a little, for fear they should discover me."

He drew back accordingly, still being in ignorance of the fact that these two dogs were foes more to be dreaded than police officers themselves.

The reader must bear in mind that the bloodhounds hunting by the smell never once quit the trail, even though it should wind round several times and the object of their pursuit still in the centre.

In this case they will follow carefully in all his footsteps—not make a direct rush towards him.

This, then, is how it happened that they did not discover Dick much earlier than they did.

They tracked him to the stone wall, from there to where Black Bess was lying, and finally came direct upon him.

Dick heard their approach.

He had wondered much that he had seen nothing of human beings in charge of the ferocious creatures.

But when he heard them crashing through the dry brushwood, the suspicion of what they were first occurred to him.

"They are bloodhounds!" he gasped, and as he pronounced the awful words a cold sweat broke out all over him.

For the accounts which Dick had heard of these much-dreaded creatures had been highly exaggerated.

He believed that, once fairly set upon the track, it was next to a total impossibility that the victim should escape.

But there was no time for thought, for the ferocious animals were very close at hand indeed.

Yet, before Dick could recover from the kind of stupor of despair and horror into which this discovery had thrown him, he saw them appear.

But the sight of the fierce creatures, with their foam-covered flanks, red eyes, and lolling tongues, seemed to electrify him into sudden life.

With a wild and desperate instinct of self preservation, he sprang up and seized the branch of a tree that extended itself a little distance above his head.

The agility which he displayed in drawing himself up and seizing another could not have been exceeded by any squirrel.

In the twinkling of an eye he was astride a branch, and, temporarily at least, out of the reach of his bloodthirsty foes.

But if he had gained nothing else, he had at least obtained time to think a little.

Under such circumstances anything like calm reflection was well-nigh impossible, for the bloodhounds, furious with disappointment, were making frantic efforts to ascend the tree.

Dick knew this to be far beyond their powers, but yet he could not help watching their movements almost to the exclusion of everything else.

Yet it was not long before Dick was conscious that his foes were somewhere in the rear of the brutes to which they had assigned the task of hunting him.

If so, he might expect them very shortly to make their appearance, and if so, his present place of vantage would be but of slight avail.

Something must be done, and at once.

"I do believe," he said, "that I could shoot them easily. They are so close that I could take a most careful aim. Then when they are disposed of, surely I may be able to find some other hiding-place before my pursuers arrive."

There could clearly be no better course of action for him to adopt than this.

Accordingly, he drew forth one of his pistols, and having satisfied himself that it was in perfect order, aggravated his foes by hissing.

They all at once reared themselves up against the trunk of the tree and barked furiously.

The opportunity had now come.

They were within two or three feet of him, so that to miss was almost impossible.

He fired.

The bullet crashed through the brute's skull.

With a sound such as Dick had never before heard, it fell bleeding and lifeless to the ground.

Then, before a moment had elapsed, his companion shared the same fate.

These two much-dreaded enemies being disposed of, there was nothing to prevent Dick from descending the tree.

The reader may be sure he was not long in doing so.

When he reached the ground, however, sounds were borne to his ear of a character that convinced him his human foes were rapidly approaching him.

He stood still listening, and wondering where he could fly for shelter.

In that place there seemed to be but slight chances of finding any secure place of concealment; and then, as for light, that was completely out of the question.

Before he had made up his mind how to act, he turned and forced his way through the trees.

But ere he had gone many steps, he saw in front of him a huge tree, the branches of which were thicker than any of the others, and upon which a few withered leaves still hung, thus affording a better chance of hiding than any other.

Dick was half inclined to climb up into it.

While pausing in indecision, he became aware that his pertinacious pursuers were within a few yards of him.

He could not afford to hesitate any longer.

The tree was by no means so easy to ascend as the other one, but Dick had a powerful incentive for exertion, and he overcame with comparative ease obstacles that would have dismayed anyone not similarly situated to himself.

But on gaining the upper part of the trunk of the tree an agreeable discovery awaited him.

The trunk itself, to a considerable depth, was quite hollow; and the width was so great that it would easily allow of the passage of his body.

Here, then, was a hiding-place a thousand times better than any he had hoped to find—and one which could not be discovered unless his enemies actually ascended the tree.

If he was careful to remain quiet, there was little fear that they would do this, as the tree itself presented nothing particular to distinguish it from the hundreds of others growing around.

It was therefore without pausing for a moment that Dick lowered himself into the hollow trunk of the tree.

He had quite expected that he should be obliged to descend quite to the bottom.

This, luckily, was not the case, or it would have been no easy task to get out again.

Either the bottom part of the trunk was solid and sound, or else it had been partially filled up with fallen leaves and other matters.

This to Dick mattered little.

He was quite content to take matters as he found them, and desired no further satisfaction than that the actual state of affairs afforded him.

He had scarcely time to settle himself in his hiding-place before he heard the sound of voices and footsteps.

The reader is already better acquainted with what took place after the entrance of Skellum and his party into the wood than even Dick Turpin could be, so that it is quite unnecessary to dwell any further upon this part of the narrative.

But by one of those extraordinary coincidences which occur more frequently than people are aware of, it happened that the spot where the baronet agreed to summon the rest of their party was close at the foot of the very tree inside which Dick had so snugly ensconced himself.

He did not overhear what had been said, but the discharge of the pistol greatly startled him.

So extreme was his anxiety that he had the boldness to raise himself a little and take a peep at what was going on.

He soon comprehended that the pistol was fired merely as a signal.

The approach of the others caused him to sink down again out of sight.

With what interest he listened to all the men had to say about the fruitlessness of their search may perhaps be imagined.

The confident way in which they all declared that he (Dick) was nowhere in the plantation amused him much.

The supposition that he might be in one of the trees disturbed him so greatly that, quite unconsciously to himself, he made a slight movement.

This was the cause of the rustling sound which had reached the ears of the baronet and caused him to cry out in the manner described at the end of the last chapter.

Dick now gave himself up for lost, and this belief caused his heart to beat at such a rate as to make him fearful that this sound would be conveyed to the hearing of the police officers, and so betray him.

This was a groundless fear, but that much suspicion was immediately excited was quite clear.

"Something moved," ejaculated the baronet. "Who heard it?"

All had heard it.

"Then we can't be mistaken. The question is, what can it be?"

"Or, rather, where did the sound come from, your worship?"

"Yes—yes—just so, Mr. Killum——"

"Skellum, your worship."

"Oh, yes, Skellum," said the baronet, correcting himself. "Well, where do you think it came from?"

"I fancy out of this big tree here."

"Nay," said the baronet, "I fancied that was the one."

As might be expected, not two agreed as to the source whence the sound proceeded.

"Let us listen," said the baronet—"perhaps we may hear it again."

All assumed attitudes of intense listening, but, as Dick Turpin took the utmost care to keep perfectly silent in his hiding-place, of course nothing was heard.

Their patience at length being exhausted, Skellum said:

"Perhaps, after all, your worship, it was only a bird, and if so, we are only wasting most valuable time by staying here."

"It may be so, and yet——"

"And yet you do not feel satisfied."

"Not exactly."

"Nor do I; but if I might venture to suggest something——"

"What—what?"

"Why, I propose that, with the view of making sure

that the rustling sound we heard was not caused by the highwayman being in hiding, we will fire a shot or two into all the trees round about; that will soon settle the business."

"Ah, of course it will! That is a capital idea, Mr Skellum—a very capital idea."

Skellum thought he had better give up the attempt to make the baronet call him by his proper name.

At a word, the whole of the party got their pistols ready for use.

"I will have a try at that one over there," cried the baronet, alluding to the tree from which he fancied the rustling came. "Proceeded; and if he is there I will soon dislodge him."

Without any further notification, what he was about to do, Sir Humphrey fired.

A few leaves and bits of broken branches came fluttering down as soon as the pistol was discharged, but no other effect appeared to be produced.

Skellum, however, did not fire himself, nor allow any of the others to do so until, in a formal voice, he called upon Dick Turpin to surrender.

Of course, the hidden highwayman took no notice of this.

He felt tolerably secure in his present quarters, and resolved to abide by the result.

The proclamation being over, a great banging away followed.

Dick shrank down as close as he could, for the tree in which he had hidden himself appeared to be an especial mark.

Had anyone been concealed among the branches of any of the trees around, he must have been discovered.

"It is as I expected, your worship," said Skellum, as he loaded his pistols and placed them one by one in his pockets. "Some accidental sound has misled us, and caused the waste of all this powder."

"I fear so," assented the baronet, with a gloomy frown. "It must have been some bird. D—n the rascal! he is more trouble than all the poachers I have ever met with put all together!"

"Before he is captured, and finally disposed of," remarked Skellum, "I fancy he will give us very much more trouble than we have had as yet."

"He's a monster—he's a—a—a—I'll be d—d if I know what to call him!" cried Sir Humphrey, with a fresh outburst of wrath. "There's no name that I know half bad enough to call him by!"

No one made any reply to this speech, which certainly was not exactly of a character to call forth an answer.

There was a very gloomy expression upon the countenance of every person present.

"The waste of the powder and shot is not all," grumbled Skellum, speaking his thoughts aloud rather than addressing himself to those around him. "All the while we have been fooling here we have been giving him the chance to get far enough away; and I know him well enough to feel certain that he would not neglect any opportunity that was offered him."

"Death and the devil!" the baronet broke out again. "Must this be suffered? Can it be endured? Curse him! I could have looked over his being a highwayman—that isn't so bad as poaching—I might even have pardoned him for riding his mare to death, though it was a shameful thing—but to think that he should come into my grounds, and shoot the animals that have cost me so much money and trouble, d—n me! it's too much of a thing! I can't stand it, nor I won't either! I'll leave him before I rest again!"

"But what is to be done?" asked Skellum. "That is the question."

"Why, capture him."

"How?"

"That's your business, not mine," answered the baronet, snappishly. "You can't expect me to show you what to do. Just make your mind up, and I and my men will help you."

"Beg pardon, your worship," said Skellum, anxiously, "I meant no offence. Only you'll admit it is very trying to the temper to have one's efforts set at naught in this manner."

"It is d—d trying, and I don't mind admitting that I can't, for the life of me, think what is the best thing to be done next."

Skellum was in the same predicament, only he was not so candid as Sir Humphrey.

Although at his wife's end, he pretended to have so many ideas that he found it difficult to decide upon the best.

"It's my firm conviction," said the baronet, "that after shooting the dogs he would run as fast as he could to the east wall, and get over it into the high-road."

This was the opinion of most present, for, after having satisfied themselves that the person they sought was not in the plantation, this was the only way of accounting for his disappearance.

"If he has gone that way," said the baronet, "the chances are a thousand to one some one has seen him, for I never knew the highway to be quite deserted at any hour."

"I believe you are right," said Skellum. "At any rate, let us try. If he has gone that way, he must have left some trace behind him."

"Just so," said the baronet, as though this was a matter of course.

"Then we will go back for our horses."

"There is not the least reason for that—they can be brought here; and, Jackson——"

"Yes, your worship."

"There is a little iron gate not far off, is there not, through which we can reach the high-road?"

"Yes, your worship."

"I thought so; therefore let us have the horses at once, and you can lead the way."

A very little time indeed was lost in carrying out these instructions, for in reality the place where the horses had been left was not far off.

"I think you may venture to mount, if you feel inclined, your worship," said Jackson, "for we are very close to the path leading down to the gate you have mentioned."

"Very good. Let all get into the saddle at once."

This order was obeyed with great willingness and promptitude, for the exertions they had made in searching among the brushwood had greatly fatigued them.

Dick Turpin, hearing these preparations for a departure, began to breathe a little more freely than he had done, while his heart recovered its usual action.

A strong desire to take a peep at the baronet, whose presence on the scene of action he could not understand, made Dick run the risk of rising up in the tree.

But any slight noise which he might have made in doing so was drowned by the preparations of the men every one of whom was talking busily.

In the obscurity Dick could not see the baronet very well, and yet he thought he should know him if ever he should chance to catch sight of him again.

Fearful that an accidental glance up in to the tree might discover him, caused Dick to resume his former position.

With great impatience he now waited for them to quit the spot.

He had not long to wait.

The necessary preparations for a start were quickly completed, and, with Jackson leading the way, they all rode off.

The sound made by their retreat was audible for some time.

While it was, Turpin did not venture to move a muscle.

But as soon as ever a general silence prevailed, he hastily descended the tree which had proved so good an asylum for him in the hour of need.

His first act was to listen.

All was still.

"They have gone," he exclaimed, with an air of exultation—"they have gone, and I have once more eluded them! The iron gate, they said, did they not? It is close to that where my poor Black Bess is lying. Will they find her? It is possible—very possible. If they do, I shall soon hear of it."

The silence, however, remained as profound as before.

By following the windings of the path Jackson had mentioned, Dick could not, of course, tell how long it would take the party to make their way to the iron gate.

Sufficient time, as he fancied, had already elapsed, and yet he waited, listening eagerly.

The continued silence inspired him with hope.

"How fortunate it was that I had the prudence to replace the leaves! I would not have had them find Black Bess for all I possess! And they have not found her, I am certain. That gives me an idea: if she can escape discovery by being covered over with leaves, why should not I? That is a good thought—I must not forget it. Some time 't may stand me in good stead."

Although tolerably certain that his foes were out of the way, yet Dick could not quite make up his mind what to do.

The desire he felt to carry out his project was strong indeed, but he was conscious that it would be absolutely folly to attempt it now, for, though his enemies had gone, he had no means of knowing how soon they might return.

To linger anywhere near was fraught with the utmost danger.

He knew that well enough, yet he could not bear to think of departing until he had rendered Black Bess the service he had promised.

If he did leave, who could tell how long it might be before he was able to return?

At length he came to a decision.

"I will reconnoitre carefully," he said, "and ascertain my exact whereabouts. Above all, I will try to possess myself of the tools which I require. That will be one step accomplished towards the achievement of the whole. Then, if nothing better offers, I will come back and conceal myself in this tree, which has hidden me so well already."

Having arrived at this determination, he noted very carefully the appearance of the spot on which he stood; and when quite certain that he should not fail to know it again, he moved carefully away.

It was necessary that he should be able to find his way back there without hesitation, in case the necessity should arise of having to do so.

Then, having gained the open space we have so frequently had occasion to refer to, he skirted it, keeping well under the shadow of the trees.

In this way he proceeded a considerable distance without making a discovery of any importance.

At length, however, through the trees he perceived an irregular pile of buildings, consisting of a noble dwelling with numerous outbuildings around it.

Dick gazed at it attentively.

He did not know it, but this was the residence of the frascible baronet, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

CHAPTER MCVIII

DICK TURPIN FINDS IT MORE DIFFICULT THAN HE HAD EXPECTED TO SHAKE OFF HIS FOES.

DICK TURPIN folded his arms and leaned his back against the trunk of a tree, with his eyes fixed upon the placid scene before him.

The moon was shining through some half transparent clouds, which did not deprive the earth of much of her light.

Viewed under such circumstances as these, the old Hall did indeed present a picturesque appearance, for all its roughness and ruggedness were toned down.

Almost unconsciously Dick found himself envying the peaceful inhabitants of this lordly dwelling.

But as the feeling was one unworthy of him, he banished it as soon as he was aware of its existence.

"I am what I am," he said—"a highwayman, and even my enemies are bound to say a bold one. I will run my course. Something comes over me even now that tells me I am near its termination. No matter, I will achieve what I have determined to accomplish. I will not be daunted by any difficulty now!"

He was silent.

But though his lips were closed, the most casual observer could have told that his thoughts were hard at work.

"Yes," he said, at length, with the air of one who by dint of much reflection has arrived at a definite conclusion—"yes, my mind is quite made up. I know now what I will do. I am certain it will be the best; nevertheless there will be no obstacle in the way."

As he thus spoke he turned and retraced his steps.

His determination it soon expressed.

It was to make his way back to his former hiding-place, and remain there until he heard something further.

"I am certain it will prove to be the wisest plan," he continued, as he strode rapidly along. "I have nothing to fear from hunger, for I have provisions about me. Besides, the night is now too far gone to leave time for much to be accomplished. I am glad I thought of this. By to-morrow night the ardour of my enemies will be much abated, and so far as I can see there will be nothing to prevent me from hiding in the hollow tree till then. Most reasonably may I anticipate that to-morrow night they will be tired out. I shall then have every facility for the carrying out of my design."

Quite fixed now in his resolve, Dick hurried on.

Indeed, now the principal thing he had to fear was that he should meet with his enemies returning from their unsuccessful pursuit before he had time to reach the hollow tree.

This proved, indeed, to be no imaginary danger, for ere half the distance was accomplished a loud shout was borne to his ears.

His first impulse was to bound forward with greater speed.

Then he stopped himself, because he became aware that he was running directly towards his foes.

What was to be done?

Their coming now was unmistakable.

They were again searching among the trees.

Before Dick was a large piece of water, apparently a fish-pond.

Thick bunches of dark green flags and rushes could be seen here and there above the surface of the water, which was thickly strewn with fallen leaves.

Another shout and the loud trampling of feet made Dick aware that his pursuers were at the most a few yards off.

The next moment might bring them before his eyes.

What was to be done?

To remain standing there was nothing short of absolute madness.

Yet what could he do?

If he attempted to cross the open space he would infallibly be seen.

If he attempted to enter the plantation how was he to avoid being seen by those who were searching for him so busily?

He had but one resource.

That was to enter the pool.

Naturally enough, he shrunk from the discomfort this would cause, but in a short time it became an absolute necessity.

He could now almost detect the very words spoken by the searchers; and what was more, every moment that elapsed brought them nearer and nearer to him.

He hesitated till he could hesitate no longer.

Gently and slowly he waded in until breast high.

Then struck out towards the centre of the pool.

Great as was his caution, he could not be altogether noiseless, and the faint splash he made reached the ears of the officers.

Their attention being attracted, they one and all set up a cry, and hastened to the water's edge.

"What is it—what is it?" asked the baronet, eagerly, but in a tone of voice which showed that he was fast getting tired of his night's sport. "I heard nothing."

"I heard a splash," said one.

"And I—and I—"

"What was it?"

"That we don't know: we have come to see."

"You must have fancied it. The water is calm enough."

Such was the case.

At the first alarm Dick had drawn his head under water and made his way towards the bush of rushes nearest to him.

There he ventured to rise and breathe.

"What's that youder?" he heard some one say.

"There—there. Is it a man's head?"

"No—no; it is too still."

"I saw it move."

"Fire at it, then!"

An explosion instantly followed.

The rushes shook slightly as the well-aimed bullet cut through them.

But nothing else followed.

Dick, who had again drawn his head under water, was zahurt.

He lifted it again instantly, convinced that that danger was over, and that the rushes would in the dim moonlight prevent his head from being observed.

"There is nothing here," said the baronet; "anyone can see that."

Yet the officers lingered, for they were by no means satisfied.

But as moment after moment elapsed without the slightest movement being perceptible upon the surface of the water, their doubts vanished, and they withdrew.

Dick heard them for some time calling to each other and crashing amongst the bushes, but after a time all these sounds faded away, and entire silence succeeded.

When this was the case, Dick cautiously made his way to the shore, for he was by no means certain that the officers had not left one of their number on the watch.

On reaching the bank, he prepared himself for any sudden attack that might be made upon him.

But nothing moved.

The silence seemed to deepen.

Hastily plunging among those trees which his enemies had so closely searched just before, he shook the water from his apparel.

His teeth chattered and he shook from head to foot, for the long immersion in the water had almost frozen his blood.

"I must move about till I am warm," he said; "to sit still thus would be the death of me, and if I lighted a fire I should, at once betray myself to those who are so eagerly searching for me."

No words can describe the unutterable discomfort he now endured, and it required him to call up all that resolution and stoutness of heart of which he possessed so abundant a share to prevent himself from falling at once into the deepest depths of despair.

But his resolution and active movements quickly caused a glow to overspread his whole form; and when this took place his heart grew lighter and his former feelings returned.

Had it not been, however, for the unabated longing he experienced to re-visit once more his dear Maud's last resting-place he would never have troubled himself to retain an existence that for him was full of nothing save pain.

This object being in view, endowed him with the vigour of body and mind that enabled him to triumph over all his difficulties.

At length, not without some trouble, the hollow tree was found.

In his present forlorn state even this looked to him like a friend, and he hailed its appearance with keen delight.

"I shall baffle them yet," he said. "Despite all their efforts, I shall triumph over them! That is a satisfaction to obtain which is worth enduring a few disagreeables. I fancy now I shall be safe for a time, and my next act shall be to perform the last service I shall ever be able to render my poor Black Bess."

He mounted the tree as he spoke, and ensconced himself in the hollow portion of it in the way he had previously done.

With what patience he could he prepared himself to wait till the time came he had appointed for attempting his design.

When morning came he partook frugally of the food he carried with him, for he knew not how long a time might elapse before he was able to obtain more.

Just so much as was necessary to appease his hunger he partook of, but no more.

Sad indeed were his reflections while in this solitary situation.

He looked back upon the past—upon the time when he had the comfort of the association of faithful comrades who were now no more.

He thought of Maud, too, until the aching of his heart was so great and so unendurable that it seemed as though his heart would break.

"All is over," he murmured, sadly—"all is over now. The old times will never come back again. I am alone and desolate. And why should I take so much pains to preserve my life now that existence is to me so insupport-

able a burden. Heaven help me!" he ejaculated—"I am miserable indeed!"

He shivered as he spoke, for the morning was a very cold one, and he had never thoroughly recovered from the effects of his immersion.

After some hesitation, he descended from the tree and moved rapidly about.

In this way he succeeded in restoring the circulation of his blood, and feeling once more returned to his numbed extremities.

With what joy he hailed the rising sun need not be told; and though the season was too far advanced for his beams to give forth much warmth, yet they had a wonderful revivifying influence upon the highway-man.

In his utterly forlorn condition even the sun looked like a friend.

The day wore on.

Dick had no other way of passing the time save by pacing up and down like a sentinel.

Suddenly, however, he stopped.

His caution had never once abated, and at this moment his quick ear caught a sound which made him return with all speed to his hiding-place in the old tree.

Hardly had he settled himself when he heard voices and footsteps close at hand.

Whether any special or new danger was thus boded he knew not, and it was for this reason that he raised himself so as to be able to get a view of what might be about to take place.

There was a great crashing among the branches and bushes around, and then Mr. Skellum, with a few of his men and several of the baronet's servants, appeared.

Slowly and silently, Dick sank down.

He was now quite content to listen to what might be said and done.

What to make of their presence about that spot he knew not; but the circumstance was most suspicious.

What should have induced them to return there?

Something evidently.

What that something was he waited patiently in the hope of hearing.

The first words that reached him were these:

"I knew I was right," said some one, whose voice was quite unfamiliar to him. "I was certain I saw something move on the water."

"Well, the bullet produced no effect upon it, did it?"

"No, that's true enough; but still, if we had looked a little closer we should have found him."

"I don't dispute that, for there are the marks in the mud at the side which show that somebody got out of the water lately."

"Never mind talking about that," said Skellum, peevishly. "All the talking in the world won't alter the case. We haven't got him, and all we can do is to look again."

"But do you think he is here, Mr. Skellum?"

"He may be; at any rate, we will satisfy ourselves upon the point."

"Well, if he is here," said another voice, "he is a bigger fool than I take him to be. I know if I was in his place I should be off as soon as I found the opportunity, and the coast has been clear quite long enough for him."

"Never mind," said Skellum, "we will look. He may be in hiding still; and if so, we shall stand a much better chance of discovering him now than we should at night."

Nobody could deny the truth of this proposition, and without further delay the search commenced.

Dick Turpin felt very uneasy.

He knew very well that a search was much more likely to be successful if carried on in daylight.

What he had overheard enabled him to understand perfectly all that had happened; and now the circumstance was brought to his memory, he recollected that on emerging from the pool his feet had sunk rather deeply in the margin of soft black mud which surrounded the water.

With this evidence of his recent presence the search would be keen indeed, and he was by no means certain but that he had left such a track behind him as would enable them to reach his hiding-place.

This uneasiness he had to bear as best he could, for he



[DICK TURPIN ENTERING THE HALL.]

was quite powerless to make even the slightest alteration in the state of affairs.

His sense of hearing was all the time kept upon the fullest stretch.

Another thing which troubled him was the possibility that some one or other of the baronet's servants might be aware that a cavity existed in the top of the old tree, and if so, the thought would naturally occur that it would form an excellent hiding-place.

Another source of anxiety was the fear that in their researches they might stumble over the remains of poor Black Bass, and if so, there would be an end to all his hopes of placing her beneath the soil in some unknown spot.

The mention of these things will serve to make the reader sensible of the amount of suspense endured by Dick while listening for every sound that might be wafted to his ears.

But he heard nothing of a decisive character.

Every now and then a sudden cry would make his heart beat at a rapid rate.

But silence would again follow, and he would be left in his former doubtful expectation.

That a very strict and methodical search was being made there could be no doubt, for Mr Skellum was anxious to satisfy himself beyond all doubts that Dick was somewhere in Sir Humphrey's grounds.

As for Dick himself, he felt by no means certain that he had not left such marks upon the sod, while pacing up and down in the way we have described, as would lead to his detection.

More than once, different members of the searching party came close to the old tree, and on these occasions Dick would hold his breath.

But each time they would pass on, and Dick would breathe again.

At last, many approaching footsteps could be heard, and in a short time it became clear that the open space near the old tree had been appointed as a rendezvous.

"Are we all here?" cried Skellum.

"Yes, all."

"Good! We have satisfied ourselves that he is not here, and now we must go further afield to find him. Follow me!"

So saying, he turned and left the spot, followed closely by his companions.

Dick could scarcely credit the extent of his good fortune.

Most eagerly did he listen to their retreating steps, and when all sounds had died away he murmured:

"Safe—safe once more! My enemies are baffled, and while they are busy seeking for me far away from this spot I shall be able to accomplish that upon which I have so set my heart."

The search in the little wood had occupied a considerable time, for already that duskiness which heralds the approach of night began to spread itself over all surrounding objects.

"A little while," said Turpin—"only a little while, and I shall be able to leave this tree. Then, knowing that the officers have left, it will surely be easy enough for me to obtain a pickaxe and a spade. Yes—yes, I can see now that all will be well."

Slowly the minutes passed, as they always do to those who have no other occupation than to watch the flight of time.

Deeper and deeper grew the twilight, until at length the early night had set in.

It was, more strictly speaking, evening; but it was dark, and darkness was what the hunted highwayman wanted.

"They have gone," said Turpin—"they have surely gone by this time, or I should have heard something long ere this. They have gone, and now I will venture to descend. I will be cautious and careful, though—very—very careful."

On attempting to move, however, he found that his limbs were so much benumbed that he had the utmost difficulty in drawing himself up out of the cavity.

He succeeded after many trials, and then for some moments lay helpless on the grass.

What an easy prey he would then have been to anyone who had chanced to come that way, for, in his present state, to have re-climbed the tree would have been an impossibility.

By degrees he recovered his lost powers, and having done so, made his way towards the Hall.

Almost at every step he felt himself better, for of course the cramped feeling caused by remaining for so long in one awkward position wore off as he moved.

Still it took him a long time to reach the spot where he had formerly stood gazing at the residence of Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

Still availing himself of the cover which the trees afforded him, he crept on nearer and nearer still.

At last he came to a stout hedge which formed the boundary of a small paddock, beyond which was an orchard that was contiguous to a garden and some out-buildings.

This, then, was the point he wished to gain.

Unfortunately for him, the further the night advanced the lighter it became, for the moon was climbing the eastern sky, and her beams were so bright that distant objects could be distinguished with ease, whereas, just at the close of the day, before she rose, the obscurity was ten times as great.

A careful observation, however, convinced Dick Turpin that no one was near enough to observe his movements, and so, by the aid of the branch of a tree, he swung himself over the hedge, along the side of which he crept until the orchard wall was gained.

Here once more he paused, but finding all was still, he was emboldened to surmount this obstacle as well.

He dropped down quickly, and was pleased to find that the fruit trees grew closely enough to each other to afford him excellent cover in his progress.

By the time the orchard was crossed he found himself very near to the hall indeed—so close that it required him to double the caution he had already used.

Looking into the garden, he saw that it was of con-

siderable extent, but now, owing to the time of year, it looked little else than an open piece of ground.

In one corner was what seemed to be a summer-house; but whether it really was so, or whether it was merely a place erected for keeping tools and such-like matters, he could not from his present position ascertain.

Emboldened by the continued silence which prevailed, he at length crouched down and ran towards it.

On arriving, he was disappointed to find that his first conjecture was correct.

It was a summer-house, and a hasty search convinced him that it contained nothing that would be of the least service.

For one thing, however, it provided him with a shelter—a place where he could stand and reconnoitre without much fear of being seen.

But it would appear as though all the people belonging to the Hall were within doors.

"I must get towards those outbuildings yonder," Dick muttered at length. "They are the stables doubtless, and there I may make sure of getting what I want; besides, when once among the buildings I shall be able to keep myself concealed."

In another moment his resolution was taken.

As before, he made a hasty rush across and then stopped.

He was now at the gable end of what he took to be a stable, and before making his way to either side it was necessary for him to be careful.

Just as he was in the act of peeping round the angle of the brickwork he was startled by hearing many voices, and on the instant Mr. Skellum and his entire party of officers came in sight.

Their appearance at this juncture, when they were so totally unexpected, deprived Dick of all power of motion.

He had felt so convinced that they had all quitted the vicinity that he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes.

There they were, however, though for what purpose he could not pretend to guess.

They were advancing, too, directly towards the spot on which Dick stood.

What was to be done?

Drawing back as he asked himself this question, the fugitive gave one hasty glance around.

As he did so, he gave himself up for lost.

Concealment and escape were equally impossible.

He had no other protection than the end of the stable.

There was the summer-house he had just quitted, it is true; but its position was such that he was sure he could not reach it without being seen.

A cold perspiration bedewed his forehead, and between his parched lips he whispered:

"All is over now!"

And yet while he made this despairing speech, his eyes, eager and restless as those of a beast of prey, settled upon an object which in a second revived his extinct hopes.

This was a massive wooden frame supporting a windlass.

"The well," gasped Dick—"the well! Surely I can hide there!"

While uttering the words he rushed forward.

His hand rested a moment on the wooden roller round which the rope was coiled.

"How deep is it?" he asked.

The question was a vain one, for, looking down, nothing but absolute darkness could be beheld.

Nor was there time for consideration.

Unless his movements were characterized by the utmost rapidity, he would be seen—it would be too late.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of recklessness that he seized the rope and slipped down it with the agility of a sailor.

CHAPTER MCIX

DICK TURPIN FINDS THE GARDEN WELL TO BE A MOST UNPLEASANT ABIDING PLACE

So short a space of time elapsed from the moment when Dick Turpin first caught sight of the police officers until he made his rapid descent into the well, that a mere spectator

would have been under the impression that, so far from having hesitated, his mind had been made up some time previously as to what he should do in such a contingency.

Dick had seized the rope very hastily, and in his excitement failed to notice that a few coils still encircled the barrel of the windlass, the consequence of which was that he descended with much greater rapidity than he had intended or than was at all pleasant.

When the end of the rope was reached such a jerk ensued as almost to deprive him of his grasp.

But the shock over, he continued to slip down until his feet reached the surface of the water, and then he paused.

The well was of considerable depth, and on looking up Dick could only just distinguish a small circular aperture over which the blue night sky seemed stretched.

He remained a little while listening with great intentness and anxiety, for the rapid revolution of the windlass consequent upon his descent had not taken place without a rumbling, rattling noise which could scarcely fail to reach the ears of the officers, and necessarily attract their notice.

But Dick found it was most fatiguing to hang all his weight upon his arms, and wondered what the depth of water might be.

This was a serious matter, for even if he should have the power to hang by his arms until the danger should be overpast, his muscles would be too exhausted to enable him to climb the rope again.

He slipped down a few inches, and then his feet encountered something which he made out to be the top of the large wooden bucket.

On this he was able to stand easily enough, and his arms were relieved of all fatigue save the slight exertion necessary to enable him to steady himself.

It was just as he had accomplished this much, and prepared to listen again, that he heard the sound of voices.

The first words that reached his ears with any distinctness were spoken by Mr. Skellum.

"But what the devil was it?" he said, very petulantly. "It must have been something. What was it?"

No one appeared able to give any reply to this question, for a complete silence ensued.

"It sounded to me like the rattle of this old windlass; but, then, who could have touched it? There's no one about."

"That's true enough, sir, and we must have seen 'em if there was."

"Perhaps it's the wind," said another.

Oh, how Dick Turpin thanked him for this suggestion, and how he hoped it would be received as a tolerably satisfactory explanation of what would otherwise be a very mysterious and suspicious occurrence!

"But the wind does not blow strong enough," growled Skellum; "and besides, why don't it rattle now?"

This was another unanswerable question.

The officers were all greatly perplexed, that is quite evident, and but for the conviction they all had that Dick had got far enough away by this time they would doubtless have attributed the sound to him.

But the fact of his being there just under their noses was so very improbable that they never once thought of it.

The reason was that they knew Dick had had ample opportunities of getting away had he chosen to do so, and they could not think that there was anything to induce him to prefer remaining there in the very heart of danger.

"It looks deep," said Skellum; and by the difference in the sound of his voice the highwayman fancied that he must be peeping down the well. "I wonder what is down? Try the handle and see."

After hearing these words Dick had just time to let go of the rope and step quietly into the water and that was all.

Some of the officers immediately began to wind up.

The bucket ascended without difficulty, and on reaching the top was found to be full of water.

This did not help to clear up the mystery in the least.

"The water will do for our horses," said one of the party. "Shall we have any more?"

"Yes, in a moment."

The bucket was emptied and then lowered.

Dick strained his eyes in the hope of seeing it coming, but in vain.

Every now and then it would go with a sudden bump against the brickwork; and there was considerable proba-

bility that it would strike Dick's head before it reached the surface of the water, and if so, the force of the blow would be enough to deprive him of consciousness.

He could protect himself in no other way than by holding his hands above his head, and it was well for him that he adopted this safeguard, for the bottom of the bucket struck his fingers so severe a blow as almost to wring a faint ejaculation from his lips.

The bucket was again drawn up, but still the mystery was as far from being solved as ever.

"I wish I could see to the bottom," said Skellum. "I feel very uneasy and dissatisfied about this business."

"Do you think there is anybody down there, Mr. Skellum?"

"I don't know what to think. It's d—d odd there should have been that row."

"Let us fire down. It can't do any harm, and will settle the question."

No opposition being made by his leader, the man who made this proposition pointed his pistol down the well and fired.

Dick guessed some such steps would be taken, and wondered what he should do in the event of it.

He could only think of one thing, and that seemed simple enough.

It was to remain standing perfectly still.

He had presence of mind enough to know that by standing with his back pressed closely against the brickwork of the well he stood many chances of escape.

No slight amount of nerve was requisite for this, but Dick was never deficient of that quality.

The event proved that he had adopted the right course.

The bullet fell harmlessly into the water, leaving him unhurt.

The explosion taking place in so limited a space had a most deafening effect.

The officers above maintained a profound silence after the discharge.

No doubt they were listening intently.

No sound, however, uprose from the bottom of the well.

"There's nothing there," said the man who had fired.

"So it seems," assented Skellum, though by the way he spoke it seemed tolerably clear that he came reluctantly to the conclusion. "Come on. It is waste of time to stay here. We ought to have been off long ago. I wish I knew what had caused the sound, though."

The officers had only their suspicions that it might have been the rattling of the windlass that they heard.

Had they been sure of it, unquestionably they would not have departed until they had made a much closer investigation.

The sound of their retreating footsteps next reached Dick's ears.

But the highwayman now found himself in a fresh dilemma, and one which seemed to be of as serious a character as any.

When the officers had drawn up the second quantity of water they had omitted to lower the bucket again.

It now stood just on the brink of the well, and the rope was coiled up on the windlass.

Dick was a prisoner.

A prisoner, too, under the most uncomfortable of circumstances.

Standing at the bottom of a deep well, nearly up to his thighs in water, that was so cold as to seem within less than a degree of freezing point, and with hardly any hope of getting out unseen.

What could be done?

It might be that water was rarely fetched from that source, as the labour of drawing up the bucket must have been considerable.

Then, supposing that water was drawn, the bucket might be wound up a hundred times and not left empty at the bottom once.

It was not even there when Dick descended.

He grew fearfully anxious.

His limbs were getting numbed, but he could do nothing to prevent it, and to shout aloud for succour would be to set a seal upon his own destruction.

Never before had he been in a situation of so much perplexity.

Oh, how wistfully did he gaze up to the circular aper-

ture above, which to him was as inaccessible as "he moon.

Many were the plans he tried to raise himself, but the smooth, mossgrown bricks afforded not the slightest hold for either hands or feet; and after many vain attempts he was obliged to abandon the project altogether.

"I must wait," he said—"I have no other resource—I must wait. I must call up to my aid all the patience I possess, and make a virtue of necessity—I must wait—I must wait."

But it was much easier to come to this determination than to carry it out; and Dick felt that never before had his fortitude been put to so severe a trial.

The intense coldness of the water made itself felt all over him from head to foot.

His limbs were as insensible as they could have been had they been severed from him.

With chattering teeth, he murmured:

"Will they find me here? Is this to be the ignoble end of my career—caught here underground, like a rat in a hole? That would be a triumph for my enemies indeed. And yet how can I help it? Even if the bucket was now at the bottom my paralysed limbs would not allow me to climb; the rope would be quite useless to me."

He was silent for a moment, and then, in tones of greater determination, he said:

"I can at least save myself from the humiliation of falling into the hands of my foes. I can die here—that will baffle them."

It required, however, no ordinary amount of stoicism to decide upon this course without acting upon it; and though Dick spoke the words we have recorded, yet he anxiously and restlessly looked around and moved about in the hope of being able to find some means of emerging.

This restlessness had at least one good effect—it stimulated the languid circulation of his blood; but so far from meeting with the slightest success, the unpleasant truth was more and more forcibly pressed upon him that escape was wholly and utterly impossible.

Dick had thought his forced sojourn in the hollow of the old tree unendurable enough, yet how delightful was it when contrasted with his present situation!

And all the time he kept his hearing on full stretch, partly because he fancied that the officers would return, but in reality still more so in the hope that he should hear some one approaching with the intention of drawing water from the well.

The very unlikelihood of any person coming for this purpose at such a late hour of the night only shows how slight a thing will serve as a hold for hope to seize upon and cling to.

But minute after minute elapsed without any sound occurring to break the intense stillness.

"I am in for a night of it at all events," Dick said at length, assuming as much resignation as he was able. "For how much longer, who can tell?"

The conviction that there was no chance of his being able to escape for several hours to come made him cast about for some means by which he could render his position a little less uncomfortable than it was.

This, as may be easily imagined, was no easy matter, especially when we remember the benumbed condition of his limbs.

Nevertheless, after many fruitless efforts, he contrived to draw himself up in such a way that he supported himself above the surface of the water.

He did this by pressing his feet tightly against one side and his back against the other.

Such a position as this, however, was fatiguing to the last degree, still it was preferable to remaining in the water.

Thus the time passed till morning came.

Looking up, Dick could see the change gradually taking place in the colour of the little bit of sky visible to him, until at length it was fairly daylight.

And when this time arrived he seemed as far off escape as ever, for the silence gave no signs of being broken.

He was now in a most miserable state, and seemingly all but deprived of the use of his limbs.

His long listening, though, was at length rewarded.

Footsteps first of all became audible.

Then voices.

Were the speakers coming to the well?

That was the question which Dick asked himself with feverish anxiousness.

His suspense was not destined to be of long duration.

Nearer and nearer they came, until they paused at the top.

By the sound of the voices, Dick could tell that they were two men.

"Now, then—look sharp!" said one. "Down with the bucket!"

A clattering sound immediately followed, and the bucket was lowered into the well.

Dick fixed his eyes upon it anxiously.

Would these men, after having drawn the water they required, lower the bucket into the well again?

They might do so, but there were so many chances that they would not, that before the bucket had accomplished half the descent Dick had determined not to run the risk.

"No, no!" he muttered. "I have stayed here long enough. At all ventures, I must be off. The police officers I have little doubt are far enough off by this, and I can easily show myself more than a match for these two fellows, even if they should try to molest me, which is more than doubtful."

Just as he pronounced the last words the bucket reached the water.

As quickly as his stiffened joints would permit, Dick seized the rope, placed his feet on the edge of the bucket, and waited to be drawn up.

So much horror had he of any longer continuance there that it is open to question whether he would not have made the ascent even had he been certain that his resolute foe, Mr. Skellum, was at the top waiting for him.

"This bucket seems a devil of a weight this morning, Bill!" were the next words that reached Dick's ears. "What is the meaning of it?"

"Oh, pull away—I can feel no difference."

The dismal creaking of the windlass followed, and Dick Turpin comprehended that there was a man at either side winding up, for the windlass was furnished with two handles.

The strain was, of course, very considerable, and much greater than it was under ordinary circumstances.

Yet they tugged away with hearty goodwill.

"I'll be d—d!" said the one who had spoken first on the former occasion—"I'll be d—d if there is not something in the bucket! Just you look and see."

"Oh, go on! If there is we shall know when it gets to the top, and that will be soon enough."

While the men stood turning the handles, it was impossible for them to see down into the well.

But the second one began to realise at last how much greater the weight was that morning than it was ordinarily.

"It gets heavier and heavier," he said. "What is it?"

"Wait till it gets to the top," cried the other, as though glad of this chance of retaliation.

But all the rope was now almost wound up.

Creak—creak went the clumsy wooden frame, as though protesting against being called upon to sustain so great a weight.

Suddenly, one of them, turning aside, caught sight of Dick's head and shoulders.

The suddenness with which he caught sight of this unexpected apparition terrified him to such a degree that he lost all command over himself.

Uttering the most hideous yell which it is possible to conceive as coming from any human throat, he let go of the handle.

His companion, startled at the sound, turned his head.

At the same time he was not prepared for bearing all the weight himself, and without knowing precisely how it occurred, the handle slipped out of his hand also.

Some very remarkable events ensued in consequence.

They took place, as one may say, simultaneously, and the space of time altogether occupied by them certainly did not exceed a couple of seconds at the very most.

But we must describe them separately, and to do so will occupy several lines.

In the first place, then, the man who had first let go of the windlass handle received a sudden blow on the bridge,

of his nose, and so great was the force of it that it sent him flying backwards, as though shot.

The other, who had the handle snatched from his grasp by the unexpected strain, received a tremendous blow under the chin, which caused him to give vent to a loud scream of agony, and fall back also.

These two blows were delivered by the stout iron handles of the windlass, and the force of them may be gathered from the fact that it was Dick's weight added to that of the bucket of water which caused them to revolve.

They went round with the rapidity of lightning, and it would have been quite impossible to avoid the blows.

As for Dick Turpin, he achieved the descent of the well in a much less space of time than it had taken him on the previous occasion.

The lower he went of course the greater was his speed, and he reached the bottom with such a sudden shock that for the moment all his breath was shaken out of him.

"D—n the fools!" he cried, wrathfully, as soon as he could recover the use of his voice.

But he became immediately conscious that he had spoken with imprudent loudness, and he became silent accordingly.

A succession of most dismal groans then reached his ears. The two men were both severely hurt.

After a minute or two, however, they both contrived to rise to their feet.

The one then cursed the other most soundly for being such a fool as to let go, and then, groaning again, they retired, probably to seek the hall to obtain some attention to their hurts.

"Now is my time, or never," said Dick, with resolution. "If I am quick, all will be well. But when they get to the kitchen they will have such a tale to tell about what they have seen in the well, that all the inmates of the place will be brought here by curiosity; and what would become of me then?"

But Dick was very doubtful as to whether he possessed the amount of strength requisite to enable him to climb the rope.

Had not the performance of this feat been of such extreme importance, it is quite certain that he would never have attempted it.

The certainty of how much he had to lose if he failed enabled him to make wonderful efforts.

Little by little he ascended.

He had to rest very many times; but he did not so much regret this, because he was conscious that each time he gained new strength.

The fact was, as he grew warmer by the exertion he recovered more and more his lost powers.

In much less time than he was aware of the top was gained.

Before venturing to emerge he raised his head just a very little above the brickwork, and looked carefully around.

Satisfied by one glance that the coast was clear, he, with all the quickness of which he was capable, stepped out and made a rush towards the building in order to conceal himself.

He was only just in time, for from another direction to that which, most fortunately for himself, he had taken, Sir Humphrey Yeomans and a whole army of his servants appeared.

As may be supposed, they were all in a state of tremendous excitement, while the baronet himself seemed to be making frantic but ineffectual attempts to receive something like a lucid explanation of what had occurred.

The man who had been struck under the jaw had received so much injury that his neck and jaws had already swelled to more than treble their usual size.

In consequence of this he could only make an extraordinary inarticulate sound, which just enabled his hearers to surmise that he had seen something very dreadful indeed, and no more.

As for the other, his eyes had swelled up to such a degree that vision to him was as much an impossibility as speech was to his companion.

He was led by two of his fellow-servants.

"It's the devil, your worship!" he kept bawling at the top of his voice. "The devil is down the well! I am certain of it, because I seed him!"

This alone would be easy.

All attempts to obtain any more detailed account were fruitless.

In vain, also, was it to endeavour to stop his clamour.

Dick waited to observe no more, but withdrew, in order to seize upon the present opportunity of concealing himself.

The chance was such a one as would not occur again.

But Dick was not a little perplexed when he tried to decide which would be the best course of action for him to adopt.

He wanted to get away from the Hall altogether, and yet not unless he could take with him the tools which he came purposely to fetch.

And then it was broad daylight—a most unfavourable time for him to think of setting about his task of digging a grave for his mare.

"No," he said, "I must hide myself somewhere here till nightfall, and then beyond a doubt I shall be able to carry out my intention. But it must be no ordinary place of concealment, for, ten to one, suspicion will point to me as being the person hidden in the well, and the cause of so much alarm. Where, then, can I bestow myself?"

The building which afforded Dick this temporary shelter consisted of some outoffices connected with the Hall.

The fugitive looked keenly at the noble dwelling.

"That is the place," he said, nodding his head. "In there surely there are chambers never used and rarely looked into; and, such being the case, cannot I find some nook or corner where I can remain unseen for a few hours? Yes, that will be the place. I fancy they will scarcely give me credit for being bold enough to hide in the very Hall itself."

It did indeed indicate great boldness upon Turpin's part, or he would never have thought of such a thing.

But his mind was quite made up, and so, without any delay, he crept along the walls of the outbuildings to one particular window which at once attracted his attention.

This window was one of those often seen in country houses.

It opened inwardly, like a door, thus forming a ready means of access to the lawn and flower garden.

It now also formed as ready a means for Dick to obtain access to the interior, and he hastened to avail himself of it.

He was not aware of the circumstance, but the reader may as well be told that this window communicated with the breakfast-room where Sir Humphrey had been sitting, just about to commence his morning meal, when the unparalleled uproar in the kitchen reached him.

He had opened the window and passed through it because that was the readiest mode of exit, and in his hurry he forgot to close it.

Little did he think that the next person that would step through it into his room would be the much-dreaded fugitive, Dick Turpin.

CHAPTER XXX.

DICK TURPIN IS CONCEALED IN A WARDROBE BY THE DAUGHTER OF SIR HUMPHREY YEOMANS.

SUCH, HOWEVER, PROVED TO BE THE CASE.

A moment's inspection satisfied Dick that externally the coast was clear, and internally that the room was unoccupied.

This favourable conjunction of circumstances he looked upon as an augury that after all he was to be successful.

The interior of the Hall was profoundly still—so still that Dick began to think that all the inmates must, without any exception, have turned out to see what was the matter at the well.

A huge wood fire was burning in this breakfast-room, diffusing a warmth which was to Dick delightful in the extreme.

On the table, too, were spread substantial delicacies, the bare sight of which forcibly reminded him that a long time had elapsed since he had eaten anything.

To remove any article from the table would only have been to make his presence known, and this enabled him to restrain himself.

On a kind of sideboard, however, were several beautiful cut-glass decanters.

One containing brandy.

No sooner did Dick perceive this than, regardless of all consequences, he seized upon it, put the neck to his lips and drank heartily.

Then, carefully replacing the decanter where he had found it, he prepared himself for action, being fully conscious that he had lost time enough already.

"They will never miss that," he said, smacking his lips; "and if they do, it will doubtless be set down to one of the servants. But it has done me a world of good. I begin to feel as though I had blood in my veins now."

While making this reflection, he looked well around the room.

But not only did it present evident traces of having recently been occupied, but it held out no chances of concealment whatever.

Dick opened a door cautiously and peeped out.

He discovered that it communicated with the main entrance-hall of the building.

He crossed the threshold and closed the door.

Then he advanced slowly, peering everywhere, until he was startled by hearing a footstep not far off.

It was approaching.

Where was he to go?

Just in front of him was the staircase, and up this, after a brief pause of consideration, he bounded, two steps at the time.

He reached the angle of the stairs only just in time, for as he did so the footstep could be heard upon the flagstones below.

Who it might be Dick did not venture to attempt to ascertain.

Indeed, all his faculties were required in looking about him, for he could not tell how suddenly some door or other might open and cause his discovery.

On the landing above, however, the silence was as great as it could have been in any uninhabited dwelling.

From this landing several dark and narrow corridors branched off, apparently forming the means of communication between the various rooms.

Dick chose what he thought was the darkest and narrowest passage of all, and darted down it with a rapid step.

There was no need to tread with any excess of caution, for the thick carpet with which the floor was covered effectually deadened any ordinary sound.

All at once, however, the end of this passage was gained, and Dick Turpin found himself standing upon another landing, which was lighted by a magnificent stained-glass window, and as the sun happened to be shining upon it, its appearance was very beautiful indeed.

His admiration prevented him from noticing so soon as he should have done the opening of one of the doors near to him.

On the threshold appeared a vision of loveliness ten thousand times more bewildering than the stained-glass window.

She was tastefully attired in a light morning wrapper, and was about to cross the landing when she caught sight of the form of a stranger.

She arrested her steps at once, and uttered a loud shriek, then suddenly darted towards the staircase.

All this occurred with so much rapidity that Dick, in spite of his usual self-possession, was not a little bewildered.

But he recovered himself sufficiently to spring forward and seize the young girl.

He saw that she was about to scream again, and so he quickly, and yet with as much gentleness as possible, placed his hand over her mouth.

"Unless the Hall is more generally deserted than I take it to be," he muttered, "that shriek will discover me. However, I will take care not to throw any chance away."

As he pronounced these words he stooped a little, lifted the young girl in his arms, and, despite her

struggles, bore her rapidly towards the door from which she had just emerged.

Having done so, he closed it with his foot, and then, in as calm a voice as he was able to command, he said:

"I ask ten thousand pardons for my rudeness, lady, but what I did has only been done from dire necessity and in self-defence. Believe me—pray believe me when I say that you have nothing whatever to fear—no ground at all for apprehension. Not for worlds would I do you the least injury; but I appeal to you by all you hold sacred and dear to be silent, and to listen to what I have to say. If you will promise this I will release you."

Dick spoke rapidly, but nevertheless his words were most impressive.

The young girl looked at him closely, and saw an expression upon his face which made her resolve to trust him.

Dick could read her thoughts as though they had been written before him, and in consequence removed his hand.

"I promise," she said, faintly.

But she was calm and collected, exhibiting no other sign of terror than that her gaze was fixed and stony-looking.

"It is well," said Turpin. "My life now is in your hands—I trust entirely in your word. I do so, because I know that I can do so safely."

The young girl did not reply, but gazed at Dick as though she did not exactly comprehend the actual state of affairs.

It was then, with his head bent, and in a voice whose mournfulness went straight to her heart, that Dick said:

"Lady, I admit that in the course of my life I have done much which is wrong—much which makes me liable to the last penalty of the law. Do not shrink from me—I will not harm you; nor have I ever done the least harm to those you may hold dear. Under these circumstances I ask you for protection—I ask you to save me."

"Save you?" she echoed, more and more surprised.

"Yes, save me; for if you do not conceal me, I shall be taken and afterwards hanged. You draw back with unfeigned horror—that serves to strengthen my conviction that one so fair and gentle as you are would not even by these indirect means bring about my death."

"Not for worlds—not for worlds!"

"Heaven bless you, lady, for that assurance! I know ere you spoke you possessed a kindly heart."

"But how can I save you?"

"Hush—oh, hush!"

Both became silent, and listened.

Tap—tap—tap!

Some one was knocking gently upon the panel of the door.

"Miss Milly—Miss Milly," said a voice, "was that you? Did you scream, or did you hear some one?"

Dick made a sign which signified plainly enough that the girl—no doubt the lady's own waiting-maid—was to be answered and dismissed.

"Martha, is that you?"

"Yes, miss. Can I come in?"

"No—no," answered Milly, for so we may as well call her.

There was no fear that she would be able to enter, for at the first intimation of danger, Dick had glided noiselessly over the carpet to the door.

"But did you scream, miss?"

"Yes—yes."

"Oh dear! what is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing. Leave me now. I will come down directly."

"Very well, miss. Only I thought as you screamed you must have been frightened; and we have all been terrified to death, for there has some dreadful thing been seen in the well. Leastways, something horrible jumped out of the old well in the garden, miss, and it struck Ritson, the groom, on the face and blinded him, besides breaking his nose; and the new stable-boy, he struck him on the mouth, and has broken his jaw, and his neck has swelled up so that he cannot speak."

This information was poured forth with that glibness of utterance for which the female sex is remarkable.

A shade of alarm came over the young girl's face.

It would have been much more serious than it was had she not noticed that Dick received the intelligence with a

noise, which seemed to say that the report was exaggerated, and that he knew all about it.

"I am all right," answered Milly. "Please say I shall be down directly, when I shall be glad to hear all about this; and tell papa I should have been down to breakfast earlier only my head ached so very badly."

"Yes, miss."

The girl retired.

Dick advanced, and, bowing low, he said:

"Dear lady, you have now given an assurance of your wish and your intention to save me. I knew that the idea of handing me over to the power of my enemies would be too terrible a one for you to entertain. You will protect me, will you not?—you will save me, will you not?"

The young girl burst out into tears, and sank down upon a chair a prey to the deepest anguish.

This was something for which Dick was hardly prepared.

Wondering much what could have called forth these expressions of grief, he stood still watching her, knowing full well that this course would be the best.

At length he spoke.

"What is it I have done?" he asked—"what unfortunate act or speech of mine has been the cause of this great grief?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Speak—speak—pray speak!"

"What have I done," she murmured—"what have I done? Why may I not suffer from this imprudence? I have had my hero—here, in my own chamber, and have not denigrated your presence! Should you now be seen, what will become of me—what will be said?"

"You are right," answered Dick, touched by her deep distress. "The thought never once occurred to me. If I had, I would never have compromised you. As it is, I shall thank you deeply and sincerely, and rid you of all further peril."

"What—oh, what would you do?" she added, imploringly, perceiving that Dick stepped towards the door.

"Do?" he iterated. "Why, relieve you of my presence, and so put an end to your embarrassment."

"No, no—ten thousand times no! I will never, never consent to that! What is done cannot be undone; but it seems it still lies in my power to save you."

"But I cannot accept even my life at the price of your fair fame. No, no. Think not of me; I am not worthy of your consideration."

The young girl wept bitterly still; but she had left her chair, and now stood tearful, pale, and trembling, with her back to the room door.

"Here," she said, "you will be safe; and if you are not seen I shall lose nothing, while you have everything to gain. It was selfish and wrong of me to be so ready in putting my own possible danger so quickly forward."

"That I can never allow," responded Dick, "for the selfishness is on my part; but in my haste I never gave it a thought that you might be a sufferer by lending me your aid; had I done so, I repeat, the request would never, never have passed my lips."

"I believe you," she said, gently. "And now let that pass. I know you not, save that you say you are in danger. If it lies in my power I will save you from all harm."

"How feeble and how weak are thanks!" said Dick, in a voice full of emotion. "Fain would I express my gratitude to you, but—"

"Enough—enough! I will leave you now, and there is no reason for anyone to know that we have met."

"Not a word respecting this meeting shall ever pass my lips—I will pledge you my sacred word of that."

"I am satisfied."

"But," said Dick, "are you satisfied that in your absence no one will enter the room?"

"I will lock the door."

"Are you in the habit of doing so?"

"No. Why?"

"Because if you are not, and your door should be found fastened, suspicion would be roused at once."

"True—true! I am distracted!"

"Let me think for you," said Dick, "for in securing my safety I am also securing yours."

"What do you propose?"

"Is not that a wardrobe yonder?" asked Dick, pointing

while he spoke to a huge and massive piece of antique furniture.

"It is. Why?"

Dick went towards it, and turning the key, which was in the lock, opened the centre door.

A good-sized closet was then disclosed, which contained only a few articles of apparel at the back.

"This is the very thing."

The young girl looked at him in wonder.

"Look," he said—"I will put a double trust in you. I will enter here—thus."

He suited the action to the word.

"Now," he said, "you shall close this door, lock it, and take away the key. If you like you can betray me—I shall then be wholly at your mercy."

The young girl made an angry, impatient gesture.

"Pardon me for making mention of such a thing. I know full well you would not be guilty of such treachery. Do not doubt my words, for I am ready and anxious to prove them by my actions."

"I do not doubt them."

"Enough, then. When you have locked the door, keep good charge of the key—do not let it go out of your possession."

"I promise that. But what am I to do then?"

"When night comes, let me out, and I will make my escape. There shall be no clumsiness about it. You will never hear of me again after this night."

The young girl sighed heavily.

"Carry out my instructions," said Dick, with much earnestness, "and all will be well. Lock the door now and descend, or wonder may be excited by your delay. If you are asked why you screamed, make what excuse you can, and do not come near this room again until the time comes for you to release me."

With a heavy, aching heart, the young girl promised compliance with his mandates, and locked the door.

Bitterly indeed did she reproach herself for having so readily given way at first to the feelings of compassion for Dick's position which instantly rose in her breast.

The consequences to her might be serious indeed.

But she had gone too far to retract, and the idea of giving up the fugitive to his foes was most abhorrent to her nature.

She felt that she could never do it.

"I will save him if I can," she murmured, as she descended the stairs slowly and very differently to her usual manner; "but I am afraid I shall unconsciously betray him."

On descending to the breakfast parlour, she found the baronet in a state of great perplexity and fury, for all his efforts to come to something like a clear conception of what had taken place at the well had proved unavailing.

His lady was also there, and both were struck at the first glance with the change which was visible in the appearance of their daughter.

But having been already informed of her indisposition, they attributed the alteration to this cause.

The circumstance, too, attracted less attention than it would have done on any other occasion in consequence of the exciting nature of the events that had taken place that morning.

So preoccupied, however, was Milly, that not even the extraordinary narrative could fix her attention.

Little, however, did the baronet imagine the subject of his only daughter's thoughts.

Dick Turpin, meanwhile, locked up in the wardrobe in the manner described, felt more and more uncomfortable the longer he reflected upon his situation.

He was perfectly certain that in an ordinary way Milly was quite guiltless of all deceit, and therefore not feared, and not unreasonably, that her very anxiety to keep his secret would lead to a disclosure.

"I must once more resign myself to circumstances," he said. "I have not much to complain about at present. If I could only sleep, now, it would refresh me, and make me ready for the adventures of to-night. I will try, for I shall be just as safe here sleeping or waking."

A great feeling of drowsiness had been creeping over Dick for some time past, and he yielded to its influence. Indeed, he was not able to withstand its power.

This might have been caused by the confined space he was in; and then it must be remembered that an unusually

long period had elapsed since he had enjoyed anything as good a sleep.

The wardrobe, too, one would have thought an uncomfortable place to sleep in, but it served well enough for the weary and exhausted fugitive.

In a few minutes he was in a deep slumber, which for a time made him oblivious of all the perils and perplexities of his existence.

How long he might have remained in this state of unconsciousness he could not possibly determine, but all at once his ears caught the sound of voices.

His first thought was that he was dreaming of what had lately happened, for it was Milly's voice which first struck upon his ears.

With a vague sensation of interest, Dick listened, and as he did so he recovered all his faculties, for he found himself threatened by an imminent danger.

"Now, mamma," were the first words he distinguished clearly, "do tell me why you have so insisted upon coming up into my room with me?"

"You do not object to that, surely, do you?" And Dick fancied that there seemed to be an indication of suspicion in the tones.

"Oh, no—no, mamma! What ever made you think that I did? I was only curious, you know. It is such an unusual thing for you to come up with me."

"Oh, is it? Well, you surprise me. Let me see, this makes the fourth time I have been here during the past week."

"Oh yes—yes—I know—I know," stammered Milly, with fast-increasing confusion. "But my headache is so distracting that I do not know what I am saying, and coming upstairs seems to have made it ten times worse."

"I don't think you do know what you are saying," was the reply; "and you seem to me to have a—a—well, I may as well say it—a remarkably guilty air."

"Oh, mamma!"

"Well, well, don't distress yourself, only you seem ill at ease, as though you had a secret weighing on your mind; but perhaps it is your headache—at any rate, I won't bother you about it now. Let it be; we will talk it over another time."

Rather a long pause followed.

In his mind's eye he could see the lady looking keenly at her daughter, and waiting for her to reply.

But finding no reply came, she continued:

"I came up, my dear, merely because I thought I should like to see that crimson velvet dress your papa bought you such a long time ago, and which you seem to have such an objection to wearing."

"Why—why, mamma—" faltered Milly.

"Oh, I want none of your excuses," was the reply.

"I am well aware that you took a fanciful dislike to that dress, and that it is the hardest matter in the world to get you to wear it."

"But, mamma—"

"Hush, I say! You know how very fond your papa is of that dress, and how much he wants you to wear it; and he has been very cross about it this morning. What put it into his head I don't know, without he expects some visitor here to-morrow, before whom he wishes you to appear to every advantage."

"Oh, mamma!" ejaculated Milly, in so stifled a voice that Dick fancied she must be fainting.

"What's the matter with you, girl—what is it you have oppressing your mind so much?"

"N-nothing, mamma."

"Oh, nonsense! I am sure there is, and I am determined to find it out! But one thing at a time. Let me see this crimson velvet dress."

"Not to-day, mamma—not to-day."

"Why not?"

"Let it be to-morrow! Anything but now!"

"For what reason?"

"Because—because," stammered Milly, with increasing distress and confusion—"because my head aches so badly. Oh, mamma," she added, with a gush of tears, "you don't know how ill I feel!"

"Something is the matter with you, I am sure. However, I can't think you are so bad as not to be able to find me the dress. It is hanging in the wardrobe, is it not?"

These words at once let Dick understand what was the cause of Milly's extreme embarrassment.

At the same time he was conscious that something was touching him, which by the feel was certainly velvet. No doubt it was the velvet dress just spoken of.

Dick now felt ten times more uncomfortable than he had yet done, and listened with the greatest intension to all that might follow.

In his own mind he gave himself up for discovered. Not that he imagined Milly would betray his hiding-place, but she would manifest so much uneasiness that her mother's suspicions would be unappeasably excited.

To the interrogation as to the whereabouts of the velvet dress Milly made no reply until her mother repeated her words.

It was then in a faint, almost inarticulate whisper she pronounced the one word:

"Yes."

Before she gave the reply, her mother had quitted her seat and walked towards the wardrobe.

Dick heard her coming and held his breath.

Another moment or two would put the matter of his discovery beyond all doubt or question.

His hearing was preternaturally acute—indeed, every one of his faculties seemed sharpened by the imminence of his present danger—and he could hear Milly drawing her breath in short and fitful respirations.

"Where's the key?" were the next words.

The question was an ominous one.

Dick wondered what reply Milly would make to it.

She was silent.

"Where is the key, child?" asked her mother, with additional sternness.

"Is—is—is it not—not in the lock, mamma?"

"Of course not," was the sharp rejoinder; "if it had been do you think I should have asked you for it?"

"It is very strange," said Milly, making a desperate effort to retain what little composure she had left—"very strange, indeed! The key ought to be in the lock."

"I know that—but it isn't. And I ask you where it is?"

"Let me call Martha, mamma—I daresay she will know. Oh, my poor, poor head, I believe I am half distracted!"

"I begin to think so too," said her mother, who began to be more puzzled and alarmed than before. "However, there is some mystery in connection with the velvet dress, and I will have it fathomed."

Milly uttered a faint scream.

At this juncture a faint tapping was heard.

"What's that?"

"I don't know, mamma."

"It's me, miss, if you please," said a voice outside the door.

"That's Martha," cried the baronet's wife, as she stepped hastily across the room; "now we shall find out something more, I have no doubt."

Her voice was full of triumph, and indicated anticipated satisfaction.

Milly now gave herself up in despair.

And so did Dick.

The former was in mortal dread of the consequences of this adventure, and felt the most intense longing conceivable for the floor to open and swallow her, never to let her be seen on earth again.

As for Dick, he awaited the result with more calmness than anyone could have conceived.

He knew what was the worst that could happen to him, and he was collected and prepared accordingly.

CHAPTER MCXI.

DICK TURPIN HAS SOME ODD ADVENTURES BEFORE LEAVING THE HALL.

At this moment the door opened.

Martha entered.

"I want the key of this wardrobe," said the baronet's lady, somewhat sharply. "Where is it?"

"The what, my lady?"

"The key of the wardrobe."

"It's in the lock, my lady."

"No it is not," was the still sharper rejoinder, for the coincident manner in which both fenced with the question gave rise to still greater suspicions.

But the cause of Martha's hesitation was, that she taken upon herself to secrete in the wardrobe some letters she had received, and her guilty conscience



[SICK TURPIN DIGS A GRAVE FOR BLACK BESS.]

her jump to the conclusion that her mistress had heard about the matter and come to look for the epistles.

The angry manner of her mistress still more embarrassed and confused her.

"It is very strange," said Lady Yeomans, glancing from one to the other of the guilty pair. "It's very odd indeed, but I will not rest until the mystery is settled. Once more I say, where is the key?"

"I assure you, my lady," said the trembling Martha, "I don't know. It is always left in the door, and if it is not there now I am certain I can't tell where it is."

"It is not there now," was the stern answer; "and I insist upon it being found without any further delay!"

Milly screamed again, and all but fainted.

"One of you must know something about it. No one has been here but yourselves. Give up the key at once, without any more prevarication, or you will find that I shall be very angry indeed."

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A dead silence followed.

It was broken very abruptly by Martha.

"Oh, my lady! if you please I was sent up to tell you something, only I was so flustered that it went clear out of my head."

"Sent to me? By whom?"

"Sir Humphrey, my lady. He is down in the Red Room, and wants to see you this very moment about something very particular."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, my lady; but he seems terribly put out about something, and was walking up and down from the window to the door for all the world like a lion."

"And he said I was to come to him immediately?"

"Yes, my lady."

Her mistress hesitated.

Her desire to clear up the present mystery was about the strongest feeling she had had for a long time, and she

ordinary circumstance could have turned her aside from it.

But such a message from the baronet as Martha had just delivered was not to be neglected.

She knew the impatient disposition of her husband well, and had long enough ago learned the wisdom of not offering the least opposition to him.

Her hesitation only lasted about a moment, yet during that brief space of time many reflections passed through her mind.

Her fear was that during her absence Martha and her daughter might consult together about the mystery which evidently existed; and she knew Martha well enough to dread that she would be defeated if this conference took place.

"You shall come with me, Martha," she said. "I shall not be more than a moment, I daresay; and then I will come back and have the key of the wardrobe found."

The change which took place in the expression of Martha's countenance was quite enough recompense to the lady, and she felicitated herself not a little upon her cleverness and penetration.

"Stay where you are, miss!" she said to her daughter; "and rest assured I shall be back again in a few moments at the furthest."

With these words, she quitted the chamber, insisting that Martha should precede her, in order that no signals should be exchanged.

When the door closed, Dick waited while perhaps he could have counted ten.

Then with his finger-nails he tapped very lightly and gently against the panel of the wardrobe.

"Hist, hist!" he said, in a faint whisper, placing his mouth close to the keyhole. "Find out whether they have descended the stairs; and if so, let me out."

But Milly did not move.

Dick grew uneasy.

Had she fainted?

He tapped again, and this time with more loudness.

No one can tell what a relief it was to him when he heard the young girl's trembling voice.

"What is it? Oh, what shall I do?"

"See if they have descended."

In her agitated condition she had some difficulty in comprehending what was said to her.

But she went to the door, and peeped out.

Then returning quickly, she said:

"They have gone."

"Open the door, then, and let me out."

"But what will you do?"

"No matter. Release me."

Milly trembled so excessively that she could scarcely draw the key from her pocket.

But at last she did so, and the wardrobe was unlocked.

Dick was in a fever of impatience, and stepped forth hastily.

Then, without delaying time by saying a word, he locked the door again and placed the key upon the dressing-table.

"There!" he said. "If you are asked, you can say you were too confused to think where it was before, or that your head distracted you."

But Milly at this trying moment gave evidence of the pure unselfishness of her disposition, for she said, in earnest, anxious tones:

"Never mind me; but tell me what you will do? How will you escape discovery?"

"Leave that to me," said Dick, with easy assurance.

"Rest assured, though, that I will compromise you no longer; I regret deeply having done so to the extent I have already, and that I should have caused you not only so much distress of mind, but also been the means of rousing your mother's suspicions against you."

"Think not of that, but say what you will do. I cannot tell how soon she may return."

Dick went first to the window and looked out.

At a considerable distance beneath him could be seen a yard, where a man was busy attending to a whole army of dogs.

He shrank back.

Then going rapidly to the door of Milly's room, he opened it and listened.

Some sounds came from below, but they were distant

ones and not of a character to excite any apprehensions in his breast.

With eager eyes, Dick looked everywhere around him, hoping to perceive some place that held out some little prospect of concealing him.

He saw nothing, and therefore, though most unwillingly, he was compelled to call upon the trembling girl for her assistance.

"Do you know of any nook or corner," he asked, "where I can dispose of myself till nightfall? Surely there must be many such about a building like this one. If you will point out a hiding-place, I promise to take my departure in silence and in peace."

"Alas!" replied Milly, clasping her hands, while her face assumed an expression of intense fright—"alas! I know of no such place as you require. What—oh! what is to be done?"

"Hush—hush!" cried Dick, quietly, "there is no need for alarm. Tell me of some one apartment in the hall that is but little used—some room where you do not think it likely anyone will enter to-day."

"My thoughts forsake or bewilder me," she said, pressing her hands over her temples. "Yet stay, there is one place—yes, I think I may say there is one place."

"What is it?"

"The library."

"The library?" echoed Dick.

"Yes—that is the apartment least of all visited by anyone save myself. There you may chance to find the shelter which you seek."

"Thanks—thanks! I have no doubt, from what you have just said, that the library will be, of all others, the place to suit me."

"Yes—yes. It is one of the rarest things in the world for my father to cross the threshold of that chamber."

"No doubt—no doubt. But how am I to find it?"

"In that I do not think there will be the slightest difficulty."

"You can direct me easily, then?"

"I can—I can. When you reach the bottom of the staircase you will see a door almost opposite to you."

"Is that it?"

"It is."

"Then I cannot fail to find it. Once more, many—many thanks for all that you have done in my behalf!"

"Name it no more."

She started at the moment, for, just as she spoke, the violent slamming of a door was heard.

"That's father," she gasped—"I am sure it is!"

"How can you tell?" asked Dick, curiously.

"Because no one else in the house slams a door like that."

"Oh!"

Dick listened, but a most profound silence ensued.

"Do you think I may venture to descend?" he asked, at last.

"I think so; but oh, be careful—pray be careful!"

"I will, depend upon it; and my only hope now is that ere long I shall be permitted the opportunity of doing something for you which will in part requite what you have done for me."

"No more—no more!"

Like a shadow, Dick stole to the top of the staircase.

Leaning over the massive carved baluster, he peered down.

But, so far as he could tell, no one was near.

"Farewell!" he said, in a whisper, which nevertheless was expressive of his deep gratitude—"farewell, should we not meet again; but rest assured that I shall never forget you. You are inclined to think but lightly of it, yet, believe me, you have done no less than save my life."

The young girl did not speak.

But she made a half-imploping, half-commanding gesture, which Dick at once understood.

In obedience to it he inclined his head and commenced a rapid descent of the staircase, for this was what Milly wished him to do without more delay.

But rapid as were his movements, they nevertheless were characterised by the utmost caution.

He did not know how soon some one might appear, and in the event of the occurrence of such a circum-

stance it was imperative that he should be early acquainted with it.

The thick carpet with which the stairs were covered enabled him to tread noiselessly, so that there was no fear of an alarm being raised in consequence of this.

Just as he was about to turn the first angle he heard voices.

He ventured to take a hasty glance.

He caught sight of Martha and her mistress.

They were ascending.

By this it would seem that her interview with the baronet was over.

What was Turpin to do now?

To descend unseen by those who were coming up was of course impossible.

To remain standing where he was would only be to ensure his discovery.

There was no place near that offered a chance of concealment even to a mouse.

Clearly there was but one resource—it was, to ascend again.

He did so with great swiftness and silence, though as he neared the top he was filled with the dread that Milly, on seeing him thus unexpectedly return, would give utterance to some cry which, at the very least, would have the effect of increasing her mother's suspicions.

But, to his infinite satisfaction, he found, on reaching the landing-place, that she had retired to her own chamber.

At any rate, she was nowhere to be seen.

This danger being at an end, Dick grew more hopeful.

Crossing the landing, he opened the first door which presented itself.

Crossing the threshold, he found himself in a small bed-room, which had certainly not been very long unoccupied.

However, it was empty now, and that was enough for Dick.

Although the door was closed, the voices of Martha and her mistress were borne to his ears, though he could not distinguish what was said.

He listened intently, until a door was shut somewhat violently, and the voices ceased.

"Surely—surely," muttered Dick, "I may now venture to say that the coast is clear. Yet, before I leave this place, let me consider whether it will be wise to do so."

He stepped further into the room while he spoke.

The window he found commanded a view of the yard where the baronet's dogs were kept, so that it was quite out of the question to hope for escape in that direction.

Then, the bed-room itself was only furnished with just such articles of furniture as were indispensable, and no more.

Not the least chance of concealment presented itself.

Having gained this knowledge, Dick made his way towards the door again.

"It will never do to remain here," he said, to himself—"that would be running by far too much risk. The library—yes, that, of all others, is the place for me. The old baronet is no reader, I will be bound, nor his wife either. Milly, and Milly only, is in the habit of repairing there. At all hazards, I will go down to the library."

Now, had Turpin only known it, he was perfectly safe where he was, nor could he have done better than remain there.

It was only natural, however, that he should fear that some one would enter before the day was over.

Accordingly he opened the door.

All was once more still.

Again he glided to the top of the staircase.

Again he descended.

In less than a moment the bottom was reached.

He then found himself again in the entrance-hall, and not far off he could perceive the stairs by which he had ascended.

The one at the foot of which he now stood seemed a secondary or more private one.

The object which attracted Dick's attention, however, was the large and massive-looking oaken door in front of him.

This, beyond doubt, communicated with the library.

In spite of what Milly had said, Dick felt a strong disinclination to open this door.

The deep silence which reigned, however, inspired him with confidence.

Three strides took him to the mat outside the door.

Placing his hand upon the knob, he turned it very carefully.

The lock was well oiled, and gave forth no sound.

Then, with the same gentleness, he pushed open the door and glided in.

No sooner had he done so, however, than he wished himself safely out again.

But it was too late, and finding such to be the case, so far from attempting his escape, he swiftly closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Contrary to all expectation, he found himself face to face with Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

The baronet was seated at a small writing-table, and had a newspaper spread out before him.

So softly had Dick opened the door that he had never heard him, nor did he become aware of his presence until Dick fairly stood within the apartment.

The emergency was one which well tested the high-wayman's presence of mind.

Although startled for a second or so, he never doubted which was the right course for him to pursue.

The baronet had seen him.

This being so, if he had beat a precipitate retreat Sir Humphrey would instantly have raised such an alarm as would have made it quite an impossibility for him to escape undetected.

Difficult as it seemed, it was nevertheless necessary that he should compel the baronet to be silent.

But how?

Dick had not determined.

Action was so necessary that it left him no leisure for further thought.

The unexpected appearance of Dick so startled the baronet at first that he neither moved nor spoke, but simply sat with his mouth open and his eyes glaring wildly over the top of his spectacles.

Dick stepped swiftly forward for a few paces, and then spoke.

"Sir Humphrey," he said, in a low and determined voice, "I mean you no harm—I would not injure you or anything of yours; but the duration of my forbearance depends entirely upon yourself—that is, upon your silence."

Still the baronet spoke not.

Dick drew a pistol from his pocket, and deliberately cocked it.

The slight clicking sound caused the baronet to start.

His lips moved.

"Hold!" said Dick. "Say nothing until you have heard me speak. You see this pistol—I have taken especial care to prepare it so that there will be no danger of its falling me in the hour of need. If you attempt to do anything that will endanger my life or liberty, I will pull the trigger and put a bullet through your head without the least compunction."

Sir Humphrey shrunk back from the muzzle of the pistol, which was by far too close to his head to feel pleasant.

"Do not attempt to play me false," Dick continued. "I own you no ill will—I have never, to my knowledge, done anything to injure you; therefore why should you be so solicitous about giving me up to the officers of justice? I say to you again, beware! for if I saw you make the shadow of an attempt to betray me I would shoot you down, and think no more of it than I should of shooting a dog!"

Now, Dick could not have spoken a more unfortunate sentence than the last.

It re-awoke all the baronet's fury.

He thought about his dogs—his matchless, priceless bloodhounds, which had cost him so much trouble, and from whose doings he expected such great results.

They were dead, and before him stood the man who had deprived them of life.

"Dog, eh?" he begun; but Dick stopped him in a very forcible manner.

"That is too loud," he said—"much too loud for my safety. Speak lower or—"

He did not finish the sentence, but brought the muzzle of the pistol in contact with Sir Humphrey's cheek.

Wonderful to relate, at the first touch of the cold iron

his face lost all its rubicundity, and assumed a strange, disagreeable tint which can be compared to nothing save dirty white wax.

"Now what have you to remark?" continued Dick, coolly. "Speak on; but don't raise your voice too high, and don't say anything disagreeable."

Sir Humphrey turned his goggling eyes full upon him as he said:

"You are the notorious Dick Turpin, I suppose?"

"What if I am?"

"Put down your pistol and sit there. I want to speak to you; but I can't while that infernal thing is digging into my cheek!"

"Agreed," said Dick. "I will sit here; but I shall not put down the pistol. I will keep it in readiness to use the moment I find occasion. My own safety demands that."

The baronet did not demur.

Dick sat down opposite to him on a chair, between the writing table and the window.

Before Sir Humphrey could speak, however, some one knocked at the door.

A change came over the baronet's face in a moment.

It was a slight one, it is true; but Dick noticed it for all that.

He understood it also.

The hope instantly sprang up in the baronet's breast that he should be able to make Dick his prisoner.

But he reckoned without his host.

"Mind what you say!" whispered the highwayman, once more bringing his much-dreaded pistol into view. "If you speak a word that I think will give rise to a suspicion that I am here, I will blow your brains out on the spot!"

This was a terrible threat, to which the appearance of the highwayman's pistol, held in an unwavering grasp, lent great extra force.

The knocking was repeated, and then some one turned the handle.

As Dick had locked the door, of course there was no fear of a sudden entrance.

"What have you got the door fastened for?" said a meek voice.

Dick recognised the speaker instantly.

It was the baronet's wife.

By the tone in which she spoke, as well as by the fact that she knocked at the door instead of entering boldly, Dick surmised that she stood in considerable dread of her liege lord.

Seeing Sir Humphrey was about to speak, Dick whispered:

"Say, never mind."

"Never mind!" bawled the baronet, with a promptness of obedience that was really delightful.

"Never mind? What do you mean? Open the door and let me in!"

"I sha'n't!" said the baronet, doggedly.

Of course he spoke the words that Dick commanded.

"But you said you wanted me as soon as I could return."

"Never mind!"

"Yes—but I do mind! There's something amiss upstairs, I am certain; and I want to speak to you about it."

"Never mind!" answered Sir Humphrey, with a persistency which must have seemed strange indeed to his wife.

"But," said she, determined to carry her point, if such a thing could be at all possible, "young Lord Orske has just come. He is in the Red Room, and is waiting to see you."

"Never mind!"

"Never mind! Are you mad?"

"Go to the devil!"

The force and energy with which these last words were pronounced is indescribable.

The fact was, the poor baronet was suffering under a double irritation, and his temper, never at the best of times a very patient one, gladly made him seize upon this opportunity of giving vent to the angry feelings in his breast.

Silence ensued for a moment; but the good lady was not to be shaken off so easily.

"Listen to what I say—"

"Sha'n't!" interrupted the baronet, furiously, and without waiting for Dick to prompt him. "I say, I sha'n't, and I tell you to go to the devil!"

Hereupon his wife beat a retreat; but Dick allowed some moments to elapse before he ventured to speak.

"Sir Humphrey," were his first words, "you are a man of discretion. I see you fully realise that your life is of far more value than mine, and that you are too fond of enjoying the good things of this earth to wish to quit it in the hope of finding a better state of existence elsewhere."

The baronet only glared at him.

"Listen," said Turpin, "and I will let you know what I require of you. Do not start or seem so surprised—it is a mere trifle."

"What is it?" he managed to gasp out.

"I want to remain in the shelter of your house until night comes. It will not be long, for the day is already far spent. As soon as it is dark I will leave your house in peace, never again to return to it, never again to molest you or yours. Tell me now whether you think the favour is not a slight one, and such as you may grant?"

Sir Humphrey gave what was unquestionably a sigh of relief, but he said, grimly:

"You have the means of enforcing compliance."

"I have, I admit; but I shall much regret if I am driven to extremities. Knowing it to be inevitable, I submit with a good grace. I again repeat that I require no more."

"Be it so," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, after a pause, though the way he spoke showed that his mortification was very great—"be it so. It's d—d disagreeable to have to submit in one's own house to the terms of a rascally highwayman; but I'd a d—d sight rather do that than lose my life!"

"Spoken like a man of sense. I am glad you have philosophy enough to look at the matter in so reasonable a light."

"Philosophy and reason be d—d, and you and all! You deserve hanging."

"That may be your opinion."

"It is my opinion; and further than that, I think hanging a d—d deal too good for you! You ought to be strung up by the neck, if only for one thing you have done."

"Indeed."

"I mean in fact," growled the baronet, with increasing ill-humour. "By all that I can hear, you had one of the best bits of horseflesh that man ever crossed—"

At these words, very much to the amazement of Sir Humphrey, Dick clasped his hands over his face and uttered a deep, remorseful groan.

"I say again, the best bit of horseflesh ever heard of. What a thousand pities that it should come into the possession of a d—d scoundrel like yourself, who knew no better how to use her than to ride until she dropped down dead beneath you. D—n it all! talk of hanging, you deserve to be drawn and quartered into the bargain!"

Sir Humphrey, as he spoke, brought his hand down upon the table with so much emphasis that it is a wonder it did not split beneath the blow, and finished off with a long string of oaths and imprecations which are best omitted.

But Dick was heedless of all.

The words uttered by the baronet struck deeply into his heart.

What he suffered in the shape of mental anguish and deep regret during those few moments that his face was hidden no one can know.

At last he looked up.

"You are right, sir," he said, in a broken voice, "I am a villain—a deep, double-dyed villain—one for whom no fate could be too bad—no death too ignominious."

"But did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Ride her to death?"

"What, my bonny Mack Bess?"

"Yes; I ask you whether it is true that you rode your famous mare to death?"

A sob almost choked Dick's utterance.

"I did," he said—"I did. Shame upon me that I did so!"

The baronet pushed back his chair.

"Then, Mr. Highwayman," he said, "let me tell you that I don't envy you your feelings. D—n me, the man

who could do such a thing as that is—is—d—n me, I don't know what I could say that would——"

"You cannot say anything," replied Dick. "But I feel—I feel it here."

And as he spoke he struck himself sharply twice or thrice upon his breast.

CHAPTER MCXII.

DICK TURPIN DIGS A GRAVE FOR POOR BLACK BESS.

We have before mentioned the peculiar ideas Sir Humphrey Yeomans had about horses.

To him, they almost came first and foremost before everything; and had he only felt one half as much kindness and compassion for his fellow-creatures as he did for them he would have been a very humane man indeed.

But it was not so, the fault perhaps not being so much of his heart as of his education—if so it may be called—for he had been taught from infancy to show tyranny and cruelty to those who were stated to be his inferiors.

Indeed, the more he thought about the death of poor Black Bess the more heinous did Dick Turpin's crime appear.

In comparison to this, the committing of numberless highway robberies seemed of but slight consequence.

For this one fact, Dick Turpin was in his eyes a criminal of the very deepest dye; and after the acknowledgment he had made, he (Sir Humphrey) would not have hesitated to believe Dick guilty of any act, no matter how atrocious.

But the unfeigned remorse displayed by the highwayman touched the baronet a little, and in evidence of this he said:

"Come, my good fellow, you seem to be very much cut up, and about as sorry as I should be if I had done such a thing. Tell me all about it; perhaps when I have heard more particulars I may not blame you as much as I do now?"

Hearing these words, Dick raised his head a little.

"It would be churlish of me to refuse you this satisfaction after the kindness displayed towards me."

"Make no mistake," cried Sir Humphrey, quickly and sternly, "there is no kindness in the matter. I know my life is in your hands if you choose to take it; and I am so convinced that such is the case, that I am doing what I can to make the best of a bad job."

"As you will," answered Dick, sadly. "Still, it is strange to me if you do not feel a strong desire to learn something more about me than you at present know."

"I should like to know whether what I have heard is true," said the baronet, after a momentary hesitation.

"What is it?"

"Why, whether your mare actually carried you from London to York in twelve hours?"

Despite his sorrow and his loss, Dick's breast thrilled a little with pride as he said:

"She did—at least, so nearly accomplished the great feat that she did not give out until she was within the hearing of York bells. She did it," he added, with increasing triumph, "and the achievement will never be forgotten—never—never!"

"And so that reconciles you to it, does it?"

"It does—a little. Still, had I known the result——"

"Known the result," interrupted Sir Humphrey. "You must have known the result. Confound it, man, if you had brought your mare to me, I would have given you any money for her! You could not have set her at too high a price."

"No money would ever have parted us."

"And yet you killed her!"

"I did—I did—I did kill her, and ever since then my repentance has been most bitter."

There was another pause, and by the baronet's manner it seemed as though he was about to say something.

But if this was his intention, he was prevented from carrying it out, for there was another summons at the door.

Dick started at the sound.

"Sir Humphrey," he said, recovering his composure almost instantly, "I have no wish to cause a repetition of the disagreeable scene which took place on a former occasion. If you will promise me not to betray me—and after all, what good would it be to you were you to do

so?—I will stand behind those curtains. No one will suspect my presence, and you could give admittance to whom you chose."

While Dick spoke these words in a rapid whisper, the knocking was repeated more than once, as though the person outside was most solicitous to obtain admission.

Then, before Sir Humphrey could reply, a voice said: "Papa—papa, do let me come in; I want to speak to you so very—very badly—do let me come in!"

Dick knew this voice also.

It was Milly's.

The expression on the baronet's face suffered considerably as those words fell upon his ear.

"Give me your word," said Dick, "then go and unlock the door."

"Enough—I promise."

"But you must not leave the room."

Turpin as he spoke displayed his pistol somewhat ostentatiously.

Having done so, he hastened to conceal himself behind the massive folds of the damask curtain at one side of the window.

Evidently Sir Humphrey had come to the conclusion that the best policy he could adopt was to submit, for he went to the door and turned the key.

The very moment that he did so his daughter entered.

Her voice had been sufficient to indicate to Dick that she was labouring under great mental agitation, and he fancied he understood the cause of it when, peeping through the curtain, he saw that the first thing she did upon entering was to give a hurried glance around.

He was still more inclined to think so when he heard her sigh deeply like one who is suddenly relieved of some great distress.

But though this had something to do with her agitation, there was certainly something else, for she clung to her father's breast and burst into tears.

"Why, my dear," he said, so kindly, so gently that Dick was hardly able to believe his own ears, "what is the matter—what has happened?"

"Oh, papa," she said, endeavouring to repress her tears, "I feel so—so very much distressed."

"Well—well, come in. There, sit down beside me and let me know your trouble."

It really seemed that Sir Humphrey was so much concerned about his daughter's sorrow as to be oblivious of the fact that Dick was present, an observer and a listener to all that passed.

"Come," he said, with the same gentleness as before, "let me know your trouble? Do not be afraid to speak."

But Milly seemed to have a most unconquerable difficulty in commencing.

In fact, the more she tried the greater became her embarrassment.

"At least," said her father, "let me know the immediate cause of this unusual agitation. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Who is it, then?"

"Lord——"

She stopped, more confused than ever.

"Lord Orake?" said Sir Humphrey, interrogatively.

"Yes, papa."

"Well, what of him?"

"He is here again."

"I know it."

"And mamma would insist upon my going into the Red Room, where he is."

"Well, and if she did? I see nothing terrible in that."

"Oh yes, there was, papa. I told him that his suit was vain—that I could never love him; but he would not pay the least attention to my words. He laughed, and said that the match had been agreed upon long and long ago, and that you, papa, were quite determined I should wed no other."

Here she broke down entirely.

"Well, well," the baronet replied, a little testily, Dick thought, "I must say that my wishes and your mother's, too, both went in that direction. We considered that the union would be an advantageous one in all respects."

"And do you really wish it? Oh, papa, do not be so unkind as to seal my misery for life. Do not force me to marry a man I cannot endure!"

"Is he, then, so very, very distasteful to you?" asked Sir Humphrey, earnestly.

"More than I can tell you," she replied, with a slight shudder. "Oh, listen to my request: withdraw your consent—do not force this hated marriage upon me!"

A silence followed this appeal.

It was disturbed only by Milly's sobs.

From his post of observation Dick could perceive that a struggle of a somewhat powerful nature was going on in Sir Humphrey's breast.

With the keenest anxiety he waited to know what would be the result, for, need we say it, he felt the warmest interest in the fair girl who had saved him, and in everything which concerned her.

"Say no to him now, papa," she pleaded, seeming to gather hope and courage from his continued silence—"say no to him, and so secure my happiness. Oh, I can never—never love him!"

"It shall never be said, my dear," exclaimed the baronet, at length, "that I forced you to do anything so repugnant to your inclinations as this union seems to be."

"Oh, papa, how can I thank you for those words?"

"By casting off this sadness. I blame you much in the affair. You should have made me understand the state of your feelings earlier, and not have allowed matters to have gone so far as they have now."

"Do not—oh, do not upbraid me on that account! Believe me, papa, I have tried my best to conquer my aversion, because I thought, if I could only succeed, how pleased you would be. But, oh, papa, I found it impossible—quite impossible!"

She clung to him convulsively, and he, with all the tenderness he was able to display, endeavoured to soothe and calm her.

"There, my dear!" he said, kissing her tenderly. "Be calm now—forget this sorrow. I will go at once to the Red Room and make Lord Crake acquainted with the real facts of the case."

He rose and went towards the door.

Dick was in a dilemma.

He did not like to step forward and interfere, and yet at the same time he felt that he should not be right to allow the baronet to leave the room.

Sir Humphrey seemed to recollect all at once the engagement he had entered into, and he paused irresolutely, not knowing what to do.

"I will keep my word," he said, after a moment's thought, "and I leave behind me good security that I shall do so."

These words were in the highest degree enigmatical to Milly, who looked after her father with surprise very visibly depicted upon her features.

But the baronet hurried off.

Dick made no attempt to stop him, for he understood perfectly well what he meant.

After the door was closed Dick was half inclined to step forward and make Milly acquainted with his safety, for he fancied she must be enduring no little uneasiness on that very account.

But he hesitated and hesitated until the opportunity was lost; and perhaps it was as well that he did so.

The baronet returned after a very brief absence.

His countenance wore a very ruffled look.

"Now, my dear," he said, "be happy once again; for to see smiles upon your face does me more good than all else; besides, I have got through with that very disagreeable business. Lord Crake does not like it, and blusters, and takes a great deal about what he shall do. Let him try—I don't care that for him!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he spoke.

But these vague threats seemed to alarm Milly greatly.

"Oh, papa, be careful—pray be careful!" she ejaculated. "Do not anger him too much—you do not know him as I do. If you did, you would not think of despising his threats, for I am sure that he would not stop short at any villainy or wickedness."

"Pho, pho! Milly, you are nervous and excited. I think, too, that you misjudge Lord Crake. However, let things be how they may, the match is broken off at once and for ever."

The baronet spoke with great resolution, and Milly, again throwing her arms around his neck, wept and thanked him by turns.

Dick Turpin was far from being an unmoved witness of this scene.

It displayed the baronet to him in altogether a new light.

"What a world of pities it is," he thought, "that a man with such a noble, gentle heart should have his mind so warped and distorted by old prejudices! Never mind—he must, in spite of this, have the respect of all who know him thoroughly."

After some time he persuaded Milly to leave him, alleging for his excuse that he had matters of much moment to attend to.

The moment she passed out he closed the door and locked it.

As he did so, Dick emerged from his hiding-place.

But the pistol was in his pocket.

He was certain that there was no need of his weapon now.

By this time the shades of evening had begun to gather thickly.

Sir Humphrey and Dick had both been so closely occupied and so much interested in what had taken place, that they both failed to notice the obscurity that filled every corner of the apartment.

"Night will very soon be here," Dick said, as soon as he observed the circumstance; "and then I shall relieve you of my presence, which cannot fail to be most distasteful to you. Yet I shall leave with deep regret, and when I go I shall entertain a greater feeling of respect for you than for any man I have ever met with."

"Because I have connived at your concealment?"

"No; that is not the reason. It is because you have displayed a noble and manly heart."

A silence followed.

Dick made his way towards the window and looked out.

It was not yet so dark as to prevent him from seeing all over the garden.

His eyes were riveted at once upon a pickaxe and spade resting against one of the trees.

They had doubtless both been used very recently.

Whether they had been forgotten, or whether the man who had left them there would soon return and remove them to a place of security, were points upon which Dick would have been glad to be resolved.

He thought once of frankly telling the baronet what he wanted, but a little reflection soon induced him to alter his determination.

The question might have been asked for what purpose he required the tools.

He would in that case have been in considerable difficulty.

He had made up his mind that no living creature save himself should be made aware with the last resting-place of poor Black Bess.

The baronet above all persons should be kept in ignorance of it, because after what he had said he would doubtless feel a strong curiosity to see her.

This determined Dick.

He would run the risk of obtaining the tools.

Darkness came on rapidly, and Dick was thankful for it.

He was anxious for more reasons than one to get away from the vicinity of the Hall with as much speed as possible.

He felt that already he had lingered in one spot too long, and nothing was more probable than that the officers, being unable to hear any tidings of him abroad, would return to the baronet's domains in the hope of being able to get upon the scent again.

Time passed on, until, in fact, some one for the third time knocked at the library door.

"Sir Humphrey," said Dick, "it is now dark enough to leave, and I hasten to relieve you of my unwelcome presence. I go, feeling a deep debt of gratitude is owing. You may smile at the gratitude of such a man as I am. But who can say, perhaps a time may come when I shall have the chance of befriending you. If the chance does come, I shall avail myself of it to the utmost; and in any case, believe me when I say that you will find it much better to have Dick Turpin's friendship than his enmity."

The baronet made no reply, but smiled slightly.

"I will put you to the test, if you like," he cried

"Do so—do so."

"Then you cannot requite what I have done for you better than by maintaining a profound silence respecting the events of this day. Do not mention the occurrence to a soul."

"You may rely upon being obeyed in that respect. Not a syllable shall ever pass my lips. But I shall not and will not look upon that as a requital. Farewell."

He bowed deeply as he uttered the last word.

Then, with a firm step, he walked towards the window, which, like most of them on the ground floor, opened like folding doors.

To turn the button and pass out took Dick but a moment.

He cast a hasty, wary glance around, but seeing none, made a dart towards the tree, the position of which he had most carefully noted.

He could scarcely repress a cry of gratification upon finding that the tools were still where he had seen them.

Prudence whispered to him to be silent.

Shouldering the much-wished-for implements, he hastened off.

He made his way in the required direction without difficulty and without interruption, for there was no longer such a sharp look-out kept now the officers had departed.

He had to pause and look well about him more than once, in order to make sure that he was going right.

On approaching the Hall, however, he had been careful to note every object he passed, and so at almost every turn he found some familiar object.

Still, it was almost half an hour before he reached that little iron gate in the stone wall of which we have had occasion to make such frequent mention.

Before going to the spot where the remains of his poor mare lay, hastily covered with dead leaves, he looked up and down the high-road, so as to make sure that none of his foes were near.

Nothing could be seen—nothing could be heard; so he prepared to set about his task with very great confidence.

But when he reached the little mound of leaves his heart sank.

A sob rose up in his throat, and, struggling for utterance, almost choked him.

With a wild burst of grief, he threw himself at full length upon the mound, and gave way unrestrainedly to his emotion.

How long he remained there he had no clear idea, for his mind was too much troubled to pay any great regard to the flight of time.

Upon looking up, however, he saw that the moon was shining down upon him with a soft and beautiful radiance.

Sighing heavily, he rose to his feet.

"All the grief and all the remorse in the world is unavailing now," he said. "It will do me no good, nor will it bring back you to life, my poor—poor Bess! When I have performed my task the earth will cover every object of my affection. Nothing will be left—nothing—nothing!"

This melancholy reflection well-nigh overcame him; but, with a sudden effort, he summoned up all his energy, and set about the task he had made up his mind to perform.

He worked with a will; and to have seen him, no one would have guessed that he was so unaccustomed as he was to the use of spade and pickaxe.

The ground was soft, and this made a material difference; but then he had to make an excavation of great size.

But as the moon rose higher and higher in the sky, his work steadily proceeded.

Only occasionally did he pause to rest, and then only for the briefest possible space of time.

No sooner was his breath recovered than he recommenced.

He was anxious to get finished, for he knew no, now soon some untoward interruption might take place.

"There is no need to go deeper, I think," he at last exclaimed, while wiping the perspiration from his dripping brow. "No one will suspect that you are here, and by means of all these leaves I shall easily hide all traces of the earth having been disturbed. Yes, I am certain it is deep enough."

So saying, he sprang out of the grave.

He then swept off the leaves with which he had covered poor Black Bess.

Once more, then, was her form fully revealed to him.

He stood gazing at her like one fascinated.

The bright moon, now high above the tree tops, enabled him to see with very great distinctness.

"Poor Bess—poor Bess!" he said, sadly. "This will be the last look that ever I shall take at these strong limbs, once so fleet, and now so rigid in death. I have killed you, and my only satisfaction is that your fame is established; and I would ten times rather see you lying thus stiffened and stark at my feet than know that you had fallen into other hands. This I can endure, but I could not bear the knowledge that you had found another master. Perhaps it is all for the best—at any rate, it will be consoling if I can only think so."

Dick was right enough there, and it was really wonderful to observe what a change was effected by this reflection.

In a steadier way, he now set about finishing his work, having the air of one who has made up his mind that it will be best to go through with a disagreeable business without flinching.

It taxed all his powers, however, to roll Black Bess into the grave.

Her weight seemed to have increased fully one-half, and he could only move her by what seemed imperceptible distances at a time.

But he persevered, and the body was brought nearer and nearer to the brink.

At last, by using the spade as a lever, he was enabled to roll her into the grave altogether.

As he had been careful to make the excavation large enough, he had no further trouble as regarded placing her in any other position than the one into which she chanced to fall.

A few moments of sad reflection passed, and then he threw in the first shovelful of earth.

It seemed to him as though some one had struck him a sharp blow upon his heart.

This was the first pang, and soon over.

Animating himself with all the resolution which he could command, he set briskly to work, and shovelled in the soil.

This was a work that proceeded with great rapidity, and ere long the large hole was completely filled up.

He stamped down the earth with his feet, so as to make it as firm and compact as possible; yet when he reached the surface much superfluous earth remained.

Convinced that it would not do to let it remain in a mass where it was, he, with infinite pains and trouble, carried it away, distributing it by shovelfuls over a large area.

This done, he returned to the scene of his labours, and covered the last resting-place of Black Bess with leaves in such a manner as would, he felt certain, conceal its locality.

CHAPTER MCXIII.

DICK TURPIN UNEXPECTEDLY FINDS HIMSELF INVOLVED IN A MOST STRANGE ADVENTURE.

His melancholy task thus brought to a completion, Dick Turpin flung away the implements with which he had achieved it, and, leaning against a tree, gave himself up to deep and bitter thought.

There was not one pleasant point upon which his mind could rest.

All was as dark, drear, and desolate as the scene around him, for some scudding clouds driven from the north-west had by this time obscured the disc of the queen of night.

As one might say, unconsciously Dick's eyes were fixed upon the leaves covering the grave of poor Black Bess, and yet the idea occurred to him of how much those dead, withered leaves resembled his own blighted hopes.

At length, with a sudden start, he aroused himself.

"Bess, my poor old lass, I have kept my word. I have done for you all that I am able. Now I must leave you. And even at this moment the conviction comes over me

that I have looked my last upon this scene. I shall never—never see it more."

He looked around him as well as the diminished light would allow him.

He fully intended that it should be a parting glance.

Having taken it, he stepped towards the wall.

He was about to look over to reconnoitre, when he was startled by a clear whistle.

The sound came from somewhere close at hand.

It was only natural that the fugitive should think it was in some way connected with himself—that he should come immediately to the conclusion that it boded danger to him.

Before he could make up his mind to do anything, however, the whistle was repeated a second and third time.

Being thus on his guard, and in expectation of hearing it, Dick was able to decide with tolerable precision as to the source from which the sound proceeded.

His first idea was that it came from the high-road, and was a signal made by some of his foes.

But now he was certain that it issued from the trees among which he stood.

This was altogether so strange and unlooked-for, that for a brief space of time he stood still in deep thought.

His brain worked busily—so busily that it would be impossible for us to give even a bare outline of what passed through his mind.

Perhaps if any notion was more distinct than another it was that he had been watched, and that this was a signal given by some one who had tracked him from the Hall—a signal that would let the officers form an idea of the whereabouts of their prey.

Such a supposition was a very likely one indeed, and one that made Dick feel no slight amount of anxiety, for he was conscious that he should now be found at a great disadvantage.

It seemed very much like a confirmation of this impression when he heard the sound of another whistle thrice repeated.

It was like the one he had first heard, except that it was fainter in tone.

But evidently it came from a considerable distance off.

It was succeeded by the trampling of horses' feet.

"I am right," said Dick, to himself, as he took his pistols from his pockets and got them in readiness for use—"they are coming now. All will be over in a few moments—I am found, and it will be in vain to fly.

"Is this retribution?" he murmured, after a brief pause. "Am I to die upon your grave, old girl? Was it so prophetic a feeling that told me I was taking my last look of this place? It seems so; but one thing, at least, is certain—I will die nowhere else. If a hundred officers attack me I will fling away my life, but I will never yield—never—never!"

Those who had known Dick Turpin could have told how terribly in earnest he was, by the way he compressed his lips and knitted his brows as soon as he had finished uttering his determination.

But he started again, and listened if possible with greater intendment than before.

His features changed their expression to one of puzzled doubt.

The sounds of the horses' hoofs had not ceased; on the contrary, they were much more audible, but mingled with their clatter could now be distinctly heard the rumbling of wheels.

"It is some vehicle which is coming," ejaculated Dick.

He drew a long breath, for he began to think it was very possible that he was not concerned in the matter at all.

But, beyond doubt, a few minutes at the most would settle that question.

Dick waited.

Nearer and nearer came the vehicle, until, with a sudden dash, it stopped somewhere very close indeed to the little iron gate in the garden wall.

Scarcely had the rumbling of wheels ceased than a footstep was heard.

By the peculiar crunching sound, Dick knew that it was some one treading with rather a heavy step upon the gravelled pathway.

Who was it?

Dick felt he would willingly give much to know, and also to learn why that carriage had been brought so strangely to the gate.

It was mysterious, to say the least of it, and therefore on that account alone quite enough to attract Dick's attention.

But, in addition to this, he seemed so much mixed up in events which had recently taken place upon Sir Humphrey's estate as to make him feel that everything connected with it was sufficient to awaken and claim all his interest.

This was why it was he stepped forward with great caution, in the hope of getting more intelligence than he at present possessed.

We have said that all around the ground was very thickly strewn with decaying fallen leaves, and such was the care Dick made use of in his advance that his footsteps were inaudible even to himself.

But he did not venture to go too near the gravel-path, lest he should be discovered.

Voices he could hear, but was not able to distinguish the words uttered, owing to the suppressed tones employed.

It was fortunate he paused, for the conversation ceased, and his quick ear caught a returning footstep.

Dick crouched down behind the trunk of the tree that was nearest to where he stood.

Then peering through the gloom as best he could, he caught a glimpse of a tall figure muffled in a cloak.

But the obscurity was so great, and the figure passed by so quickly, that Dick was unable to form any definite opinion regarding his identity.

He disappeared, and his footsteps soon ceased to be heard.

"I must learn more of this affair," murmured Dick. "I feel that merely for my own safety's sake I ought to gather more intelligence. I will do it. But what shall be the first step?"

It did not require much deliberation to enable him to come to a decision upon this point.

With the same stealthfulness as he had formerly employed, Dick crept towards the wall.

On gaining it, he raised himself and peeped over the coping.

To his surprise, he saw, drawn up quite close to the little iron gate, a large travelling carriage.

It was drawn by four horses.

Upon one sat the postillion, and just inside the vehicle, partially revealed by the light of a lamp, Dick fancied he could detect some one seated and leaning back with folded arms.

He continued to gaze for several seconds.

Then, finding that there was really nothing of which he could take further cognisance, he retired, making use of the same silence and caution as before.

"There is something more in this than appears at first sight," he murmured. "I must try and find out what has become of the man in the cloak. It may be he will be the one that will throw a light upon all these dark proceedings."

With these half-uttered words upon his lips, Dick crept onwards in the direction taken by the stranger.

He did not actually tread upon the gravel-path, but he kept very close indeed to the edge of it.

Still, although he paused at frequent intervals, he found that all was profoundly still.

No sounds whatever floated to his keen, listening ears.

Further and further on he went—so far that he began to think that the stranger must have abandoned the gravel-path and struck off in some other direction.

Just as he paused in irresolution, he detected the faint murmuring of voices.

A little attention made him aware of the locality whence they proceeded, and he hastened in that direction.

As he went, he soon became sensible that the way was familiar to him.

He had trod that part of the domains before.

All at once he recollected that he was approaching the pond where he had had so narrow an escape from being wounded by the bullet from the officer's pistol.

But had to manifest if possible still greater caution in all his movements, owing to the silence which prevailed and the somewhat open nature of the spot.



[DICK TURPIN FALLS SENSELESS BEFORE THE GIPSY'S TEST.]

Two figures stretched met Turpin's view.

One was male, the other female, and that was about all he could distinguish clearly, save that they were talking very earnestly together.

So earnestly indeed, that he was emboldened to approach much nearer than he would otherwise have deemed prudent.

Nearer and yet nearer still he crept, in the continual hope that he should be able to overhear at least a few of the words they were exchanging.

He was successful.

The first words he detected were these:

"My lord, all your urgings are quite vain—it is useless for you to repeat them or to add others. I can never—never love you. You compel me to speak thus boldly. My father has put an end to the engagement between us—if such it could be called—and henceforth we must be strangers."

No. 246.—BLACK BERR.

Dick knew that voice.

Every tone of it sent a thrill of gratitude and pleasure through his heart.

It was his protector—the baronet's daughter—who had spoken.

Great as had been the amount of interest experienced from the first by Dick, it was as nothing when taken in comparison with that which he now felt.

Why was she there?

What meant that carriage at the gate?

Who was her companion?

It was to the last of these three questions that Dick was able to return the most satisfactory reply.

It was Lord Crake who was standing by her side—the rejected suitor—and the individual who, no doubt, had blown the whistle which for a time excited so much uneasiness in Dick's breast.

But he had not much opportunity for speculation.

All his faculties were required to listen to what was said.

Lord Crake did not return any immediate reply; and Milly, in a voice which showed that her breast was full of agitation, continued:

"You assured me," she said, "that it was of the highest importance to me that I should meet you on this spot to-night—that not only my happiness depended upon it, but absolutely the welfare of all those that I hold dear. It was this last consideration which influenced me most—which induced me, after much hesitation, to make up my mind to accede to your request. I am here. Why do you not make the communication to which you have referred?"

"Have you weighed well all that you have said?" asked her companion, in a manner that seemed to alarm the young girl greatly.

"Yes," she answered, with an effort. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply that you should have nothing to reproach me with."

"How reproach you?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"Speak."

"You are perfectly certain that you do not and cannot love me?"

"Perfectly certain."

The answer was given with great dignity and firmness.

"And that no circumstances will occur that will induce you to love me sufficiently for you to consent to become my wife?"

"I do not believe it possible."

"Enough. We now understand each other."

"Sir!"

"You have spoken out clearly. Now it is my turn."

She shrank back in affright at his menacing manner.

But he stepped up closely to her, and, seizing her by the wrist, said, in rapid tones:

"Understand me clearly. You are in my power—wholly, utterly in my power, and, such being the case, I do not mind letting you know what you may expect. In the first place, then, I care no more for you than you do for me—and that is little enough, no doubt."

There was much bitterness in the way these words were pronounced.

But, without pausing, he continued, rapidly—so rapidly, and with so much apparent vindictiveness that Milly, terrified and, as it were, fascinated, neither moved nor spoke.

"But you are an heiress, while I am almost a bankrupt in purse. But it is your wealth I covet—and your wealth that I am determined to have! I tell you so without disguise. I would gladly have had it by fair means; but since you will not have it so, why, rather than fail, I will have it by foul! You are alone—no one can hear you even if you should cry out. Those at the Hall know nothing of your absence. I have things all my own way."

He ended almost with a scream of exultation.

But Dick went just a trifle nearer, and as he did so he said to himself:

"Not quite so much as you imagine, my lord."

As for poor Milly, she was ready to sink to the ground with apprehension.

Terror overpowered all her faculties.

"Perhaps now," he continued, with a scornful and triumphant air—"perhaps now you wish you had behaved better to me, but it is too late. You are mine—wholly, irrevocably mine. My last chance of saving myself from utter ruin lies in making you my wife."

At these dreadful words Milly shrieked aloud.

So loud and piercing was the cry, and so shrilly did it seem to echo all around, that Dick fancied it could not fail to reach the ears of the inmates of the Hall.

Upon hearing this scream, Turpin's first impulse was to spring forward, but this reflection controlled him.

"Another cry like that," said Lord Crake, with savage bitterness, "and you shall dearly rue having given it utterance. I tell you again that you are mine—that you cannot escape me. Listen—listen!"

Milly appeared almost ready to sink to the earth.

Indeed, it is probable that the tight grasp which was maintained upon her wrist kept her from falling.

Lord Crake went on.

He spoke with additional excitement.

"Close at hand I have a carriage waiting—fleet horses are harnessed to it—faithful fellows of my own are in attendance. That vehicle shall carry us to a village some twenty miles off, and when we have passed a night there you will be glad to beg to be my wife instead of indignantly refusing as you do now."

"Help—mercy—help!" said Milly, faintly.

But, with a mocking laugh, her companion advanced a step, and flung his arms around her as though about to bear her away by main force from the spot.

Dick had kept quiet thus long with great difficulty.

He could not have done so but for his firmly-grounded expectation that ere long some one from the Hall would appear upon the scene.

But no one came, and so he resolved to interfere.

It was impossible to let matters go on further.

Other reasons, perhaps, induced Dick to hold back as he had done.

He knew well that he was near enough to step forward at any moment and save Milly from any personal harm, and he wished to know to what extent Lord Crake would commit himself.

Precipitation on Dick's part would have ruined all.

Besides, the disappointment of his lordship would be all the greater, and consequently his punishment all the more severe, if he was foiled in what he believed to be the crowning moment of his success.

But when Dick saw him fling his arms around her in the manner we have described, his intentions being, doubtless, to bear her to the carriage that was in waiting, he could contain himself no longer.

With a sudden bound, he quitted his place of concealment and stood before Lord Crake.

Dick held a pistol in his hand, and the use that he immediately made of it was to present it to his lordship's breast, while he said, in a suppressed voice:

"Villain! release your hold upon this lady! And if you refuse, or raise such an outcry as shall bring your fellows to your aid, this moment shall be your last!"

It may safely be asserted that his lordship could not have been more astonished if Dick had suddenly dropped from the clouds.

It was probably while under the influence of this amazement that he released his hold upon his captive.

In her agitation, she did not at first recognise Turpin.

Finding in a moment to whom it was she owed her deliverance, she clung to him for protection.

"Save me—save me!" she half shrieked. "Save me from this man! You spoke about your gratitude—you have now an opportunity of showing it! Save me—save me!"

"Be under no apprehensions," said Dick; "you are quite safe. I have been watching you, and should have interfered before had I thoroughly understood the matter."

Dick still kept the barrel of his pistol steadily pointed at Lord Crake, who made not the least attempt either at resistance or escape.

But that he should prove one of the rankest cowards in the world will surprise no one, for none but a coward could have planned the base design which Turpin had so fortunately been able to frustrate.

But advancing footsteps could now be heard, and immediately afterwards lights appeared here and there among the trees.

Voices, too, were heard calling out, and Dick, believing these new-comers to belong to the Hall, responded to their cries in order to guide them to the scene of action.

Upon observing this, Lord Crake made an attempt to fly.

Turpin, however, prevented him in a moment by seizing him by the arm and pressing the muzzle of the pistol against his cheek.

Footsteps were now heard coming from the direction of the iron gate.

It was at this moment, too, that the first party appeared.

With a glad cry of relief, Milly left Dick's side and flung herself upon the breast of some one that Dick instantly recognised to be the baronet.

Sir Humphrey looked about him in great surprise.

evidently unable to comprehend the meaning of what he saw.

Before he could collect himself sufficiently to ask a question, Lord Crake's two accomplices came into view.

No sooner did they find themselves confronted by so large a party than they turned and fled.

"Seize those men!" cried Turpin, in a loud voice. "Do not allow them to escape on any account!"

There was so much command in the way he spoke that, without hesitation, several set off in pursuit, not pausing to ask themselves who had issued the order and whether they ought to obey it.

The sound of Dick's voice had the effect of drawing the baronet's attention to him.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "is it you? What is the meaning of all this?"

"Ask your daughter, and ask this man," responded Dick.

Sir Humphrey at once appealed to Milly.

The task of giving a relation of what had taken place was almost beyond her powers.

But she said enough to enable her father to comprehend the rights of the case.

His rage was so great that he was about to inflict a summary chastisement upon his lordship there and then.

But a fresh event occurred, which produced an entire revolution.

This was nothing less than the return of Mr. Skellum and his party.

They had been many miles round the country, and although they had everywhere made the closest inquiries, they had failed to learn any particulars of the man they sought.

That he could have got away entirely unseen they did not believe to be possible, and it was this belief which induced them, as a kind of last hope, to return to the vicinity of the Hall.

Mr. Skellum in especial clung to the idea that Dick was concealed somewhere on the premises.

Very luckily, Dick was apprised of their approach before they came into view.

One of those who had started off in pursuit of Lord Crake's two accomplices came back and said:

"Your worship—your worship! the Linnon officers have come back! They will be here in a minute! That's what I call lucky!"

"Hold this fellow, some one!" cried Dick, referring to his lordship.

Half a dozen eagerly rushed forward and seized him.

Dick was about to dash off at once, in the vague and desperate hope that he should be able to secure his safety by immediate flight, when Milly flung herself before him and arrested his further progress.

"Father—father, this man—I know not who he is, save that he is in terror of the law, and that the officers are doing all they can to take him prisoner—I say it is to him, and to him alone, that I owe my safety this night. But for his interposition Lord Crake would have carried out his odious designs. Surely such a great service as this should not go unrequited? No, no—a thousand times no! You must interpose your authority—you must prevent his capture."

Sir Humphrey, as a rule, was not a very good thinker.

More particularly was he puzzled when several things were said to him in a breath, and when it was necessary for him to decide suddenly upon some method of proceeding.

But his faculties had been much quickened by the discovery of the imminent danger in which his daughter had been placed.

He was able to understand the peril in which Dick stood.

But he knew not how to save him.

The officers were not more than a few yards distant, and in a moment or two would appear upon the scene.

Publicly to attempt to throw the shield of protection before him he knew to be far beyond his powers.

What, then, was he to do?

He was willing to save Dick, for he prized his daughter highly.

But the matter required careful and continued thought.

This was now out of the question.

It was imperative that he should make up his mind at once.

CHAPTER MCXIV.

DICK TURPIN CONCEALS HIMSELF IN THE OLD SUMMER-HOUSE.

WHEN Milly first spoke, Dick had remained still, his breast being filled with the vague hope that Sir Humphrey might in some way interpose and save him.

Unless something of the kind was done, too, he felt that his chances of escaping his persistent foes were slight indeed.

But when he saw the indecision which manifested itself in the baronet's manner, he resolved not to linger and not to depend upon anyone but himself in procuring his safety.

"Many thanks," he said, gently striving to release himself from Milly's grasp. "The intention to help me is as well appreciated and as much valued as the very act of doing so would be. But you must leave me to shift for myself."

"Nay, I'll be d—d if I do!" said the baronet, with great warmth.

"But I must go!" pleaded Dick. "It will be death to me if I remain here another moment!"

"Where will you go?"

"Leave that to me."

"No, I tell you!"

"Too late—too late!"

"No—no! Skirt the fishpond here—make your way as fast as you can along the path, and it will bring you in sight of an old, dilapidated summer-house. Enter that, and you are safe."

"How so?" asked Dick, eagerly.

He had released himself from Milly's detaining grasp, and was about to dart off, when the last words of the baronet arrested him and revived his hopes.

"There is a fireplace there," continued the baronet, speaking with great haste and excitement, though he so suppressed his voice that none but his daughter and the fugitive could hear him—"press down on the right-hand corner of the mantel-shelf, and pull towards you—a recess will be disclosed—"

The baronet would doubtless have entered into further particulars, but Dick had heard enough to answer his purpose.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" he cried, and then rushed off at the top of his speed in the direction mentioned by the baronet.

But he had already lingered too long.

The police officers all caught sight of the flying form.

Mr. Skellum held a rawn pistol in his hand.

"Stop—stop," he yelled—"stop, or I fire!"

But Dick only increased his pace.

Skellum was as good as his word.

He pulled the trigger.

"I believe I have winged him," he said, as coolly as though he had been speaking of a partridge.

It was at this moment that he caught sight of Sir Humphrey.

"I have him now, your worship—I feel sure I have him now! Something seemed to tell me that he was still lurking about your premises."

Sir Humphrey did not speak, for the very simple reason that he knew not what to say.

He seemed, too, to have a very great amount of confidence in the hiding-place he had signified to Turpin.

His only fear was as to the extent of the hurt he had received.

On the present occasion Skellum was too much excited by the success he had met with to show the baronet much of that deference which he had hitherto been so careful to display.

No sooner had he finished speaking the words we have just recorded than he slipped from his horse, and, calling to his men to follow him, dashed off in pursuit.

Poor Milly was a prey to a thousand terrors.

It was an instinct with her to side with the unfur-

fortunate; and the mere fact of Dick having so many enemies to contend with would doubtless have called forth all her compassion; but now that he had rendered her such an important service, she was doubly anxious that he should be saved.

Indeed, when Skellum departed so suddenly, she was just calming herself with the intention of making an appeal to him to let the highwayman go free.

As this appeal would have been utterly fruitless, it was quite as well that it should have been left unmade.

"Oh, father—father," she exclaimed, bursting into tears, and clinging convulsively to Sir Humphrey's breast, "we shall see him slain before our eyes!"

"No—no, my dear! I believe—that is, I hope that he is quite safe. If he can only reach the summer-house in time to conceal himself in the recess——"

"But I am afraid he has not had time. Do you think he has?"

"It is hard to say. He would make great speed unless very severely wounded, which I hope he is not."

Milly wept afresh.

"Have you no power to save him?" she asked. "If you have, exert it for my sake."

"Openly, I have not; but if he has gained the recess all will be well."

"Will not the officers discover it?"

"There is little fear. The secret was, I believe, known only to me up to to-night. It was a contrivance made in troublous times, in order to afford a hiding-place and a means of escape."

No more was said then upon the subject, for Lord Crake interrupted them.

He had been greatly disconcerted by the unexpected turn which affairs had taken, and not a little astonished by the arrival of the police officers, and the events which had succeeded.

But that base, unblushing effrontery of which he possessed no inconsiderable share at last came to his aid.

Immediately he set about attempting to free himself from his present position.

"Sir Humphrey," he cried, in a loud voice, "I know not what your purpose or intention may be in keeping me a prisoner thus; but I can assure you the wisest thing you can do is to set me at liberty."

This cool request would most likely have brought some terrible epithets to the lips of Sir Humphrey had not Milly interposed.

"Yes—yes," she said—"set him free. Let us never see him more. We know him now, and in the future shall be able to beware of him."

"If I do, may I——"

"Hold!" interrupted the dissolute young noble. "Just ask yourself what good you are likely to derive by pushing this matter to extremities? I tried a bold plan—I have failed. Let that be the end of the matter; and the quieter it is kept and the less your daughter is mixed up and mentioned with it, the better it will be for her reputation."

What effect this hint may have had upon the mind of the hot-tempered baronet we know not.

But he said to those who held Lord Crake in custody:

"Release him—let him go where he likes. If I want him I shall be able to find him, and until then he will only be an incumbrance."

The men quitted their hold upon him with great reluctance.

They were every one deeply devoted to their young mistress, and felt keenly the gross insult that had been offered her.

Their fingers itched to take some personal cognisance of the matter.

Most wishful and significant were the glances cast towards the fishpond.

The presence of their master, however, restrained them.

They were well acquainted with his fiery disposition, and had all learned the wisdom of showing implicit obedience to his commands.

"Papa—papa," said Milly, "let us leave this place. Let us follow the police officers to the old summer-house. Who knows what may have happened? Who can say that our presence will be altogether useless?"

Having nothing to keep him on the present spot, the baronet readily yielded to his daughter's wish.

Moreover, he was very anxious to have his own natural curiosity gratified.

Their departure was eagerly watched by the men who had so lately had charge of Lord Crake.

In another moment, without a word being exchanged—for all were animated by the same desire—they turned and pounced upon their late prisoner, who had not yet had time to get out of their reach.

In vain he struggled and fought, and called in a loud voice upon Sir Humphrey.

The baronet either could not or would not hear.

"Into the old fishpond with him!" was the general cry. "We will make him ford his way across it. Come on—come on! We'll cool his love for him, I'll warrant!"

Lord Crake stood in great dread of his prospective punishment.

He was one of those effeminate creatures to whom the idea of cold water is too horrible to endure a moment's contemplation.

And then the water in the pond too, so thickly overgrown with green slimy weeds as it was, and so bitterly cold as it would most likely prove, for it was the winter season.

But his captors did not think once of turning aside from any such consideration as this.

In vain he offered them large sums of money if they would only set him at liberty—if they would only relinquish their intention of giving him a cold bath.

Then he tried threats, warning them what would be the consequence if they perpetrated this assault upon him.

To his mortification he discovered that no more notice was taken of his threats than of his bribes.

"Now then, my lads," cried one; "let us go all together. Get ready!"

"Right you are!"

"One—two—three!"

At the last word they suddenly ceased swinging him to and fro between them, and the consequence was he was hurled forward through the air several feet.

He came down with a terrific splash into the water; and as he happened to reach it upon his back, he floundered about most tremendously for a moment or two, to the infinite amusement and satisfaction of his tormentors.

At last, blinded and breathless, he gained his feet, and made a frantic dash towards dry land.

But they drove him off.

They were determined not to let him get out unless he chose to wade across and emerge upon the other side.

But, stung to rage and fury, he foolishly refused to do this.

But the men were firm, and all his attempts to land proved fruitless.

They pelted him with stones; they picked up handfuls of the half-dry mud at the brink of the pond and flung at him, until his condition was deplorable indeed.

In the end he had to succumb.

But the yell of delight and derision with which he was greeted when he turned his back to them and began to wade across, so infuriated him that he paused, and seemed half inclined to commence the unequal contest again.

But he thought better of it.

Summoning up all his energies, he made his way across the pond with all the speed that was possible.

But as the sheet of water was of considerable extent, the feat was neither easily nor speedily accomplished.

When he did reach the other side, a more forlorn-looking object than this dissolute young nobleman presented could not by any means be imagined.

Dripping with wet, plastered from head to foot by the slimy mud at the bottom of the pond, and the still more, slimy green weed which floated on the surface, and with his features scarcely distinguishable, he did indeed look the very embodiment of wretchedness.

A shriek of laughter from the men on the opposite bank reached his ears.

Maddened with fury, he turned round and shook his clenched fists, while curses and threats of vengeance poured from his lips.

But, from a movement that was made by the throng, he surmised that they were about to run round with the view of repeating their discipline.

This was greatly to be dreaded, so turning round, he

more along at the utmost speed he was capable of making.

He pressed his hands to his ears, so as to shut out the derisive cries by which he was pursued, and felt truly thankful when a little clump of trees hid him from their hated view.

Leaving him to his fate, however, we return to him, who requires all our attention.

Mr. Skellum was quite right when he said he had "winged him."

Dick was conscious of two things, which seemed to him simultaneous.

These were a sharp blow on his arm, such as might be given by a stick, and the report of a pistol.

He knew he was wounded in the arm even before he observed that it was hanging by his side numbed and painless.

But the effects, of course, would quickly make themselves felt.

Still he did not pause; but, grinding his teeth, bounded forward with additional speed.

He heard his pursuers hastening after him, and he would have at once given himself up for lost but for the hope of safety which the old summer-house held out to him.

That stimulated him to make what we are justified in calling supernatural exertions.

It was not until he had run for some distance, and felt the warm blood trickling down his fingers, that he remembered that he was leaving a crimson trail behind him, which the officers would have no trouble whatever in following.

Unless this was stopped, even the secret recess in the old summer-house would prove valueless to him.

He was obliged to pause, though by pausing he knew how very greatly he was diminishing his chances of safety.

Still it was unavoidable.

With great rapidity he tore off his neckcloth, and with equal speed bound it roughly round his arm, so that even if the flow of blood was not stanching, yet it was prevented from trickling to the ground.

The delay was so trifling as to be, under ordinary circumstances, almost unappreciable.

Yet, in the present instance, it allowed his foes to gain upon him fearfully.

Nerving himself to make, if possible, increased exertion, Dick followed in the direction indicated by the baronet, straining his eyes in the continual hope of being able to catch sight of the dilapidated building.

At last he saw something that was a few shades darker than other objects around him, and towards this he ran, convinced it was what he wanted.

Breathless, and throbbing with pain, he dashed open the partially-closed door, and glared around him.

That is, he endeavoured to do so, for the interior of the summer-house was profoundly dark.

Still he fancied he saw the fireplace, and strode across the flooring.

He was right.

Remembering the directions he had received, he pressed upon one end of the mantel-shelf, and then pulled towards him.

Having only one hand to use, he found this task a difficult one.

But the exigency of his situation seemed to endow him with fresh strength.

The whole mass came towards him.

Whether there really was a recess or not, he could not perceive; but, pushing in, he found the baronet had described the hiding-place correctly.

But by the time this much was done the officers had got to within a dozen yards of him.

He had still to pull the fireplace back into its place again, and about this he had not waited to receive any instructions whatever.

But Dick's fingers were busy.

With great haste he felt up and down, and in an instant encountered a kind of handle, shaped something like a loop.

This he seized with his right hand, and then pulled towards him with all his might.

The front of the fireplace was made to open on hinges after the fashion of a door, and he pulled until it was impossible to pull any further.

Yet, even then he did not release his hold, but stood grasping the handle, and waiting with no trifling amount of anxiety the approach of his foes.

In this respect he would not have grumbled if his patience had been taxed a little more severely, for scarcely had he drawn the grate into its place than several of his foes reached the threshold.

"Hullo!" said a voice, which he recognised at once as being Mr. Skellum's—"hullo! what place have we here? Is he inside, I wonder?"

"I believe I saw him enter," said another voice, "though the darkness prevents me from saying for certain."

"Well, we shall soon know," continued Skellum. "Out with a light, some of you! Be quick, can't you!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before Dick caught sight of a glimmer of light.

This naturally raised in his breast a thousand apprehensions.

He made sure that as he could see this light he could not properly have closed the recess.

If so, nothing could prevent his discovery.

With an anxiousness of which it is possible for some remote idea to be formed he waited to hear what should happen next.

The lantern seemed to be flashed all round the place, and then some one said:

"There's no one here."

"So it seems," responded Skellum, though by the tone in which he spoke it might be inferred that he was not over well assured of the fact.

"I fancied myself I saw him come in here," he continued; "and it is certain he made in a direct line for the place; but I must have been deceived, for there is not room here to hide a cat."

Indeed, the summer-house, owing to its disuse, was absolutely destitute of every article of furniture.

A silence ensued.

Dick's heart beat at such a fearful rate, and to him apparently with so much loudness, that he dreaded it would betray him.

The officers retired towards the door.

Dick breathed a little.

They crossed the threshold.

He breathed with tolerable ease.

The officers went a little way and listened.

But not the faintest sound reached their ears.

They regarded each other with puzzled looks.

This disappearance, so sudden and so complete as it appeared to be, was most mysterious.

What had become of him?

He could scarcely have continued his flight, because, had he done so, the unavoidable noise made by his rapid progress would have been audible at a great distance.

"He is hiding somewhere again, sir," cried one of the officers. "Why, he is ten times worse to hunt than a fox."

"Never mind," said Skellum. "We will take our time. He can't get far, that's one comfort. I'll find out where he is hidden, depend upon it."

That he was hidden somewhere was the general impression.

It was at this juncture that Sir Humphrey and his daughter made their appearance.

They were both somewhat breathless, in consequence of the speed they had made.

"Have you got him?" gasped the baronet.

Mr. Skellum was obliged to make the mortifying confession that he had not.

And now, had he not considered that the fact of the pair before him being in collusion with the fugitive was wholly impossible, he must have had his suspicions aroused by the satisfaction which Milly manifested on receipt of the admission.

It was not that she spoke or started, but she gave her father a glance that was in the highest degree expressive.

"Why, bless me," puffed the baronet, wiping his face with his silk handkerchief—"the fellow doubles and turns like a fox. I thought you had shot him."

"So I did, sir, there's no mistake about that," said Mr. Skellum, as though he derived uncommon satisfaction from his knowledge of the fact.

"Then how the devil has he contrived to slip through

your fingers this time," asked the baronet, "and you so close at his heels, too?"

"That's what I can't make out just at present," replied Skellum. "But I don't despair. He is not far away, I am assured."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because of the suddenness of his disappearance. He has got into a hiding-place somewhere close by—no doubt the same in which he had been concealed while I searched for him before."

The concern which Milly now felt and unconsciously displayed in her countenance was even still more provocative of suspicion than her former satisfaction.

Luckily, however, Mr. Skellum did not observe it; and this is not so much to be wondered at when it is borne in mind that there was no other light than issued from the dark lantern of one of the men.

"So you do not despair?" said the baronet.

"Not by any manner of means. He is hidden somewhere within a few yards of this place; perhaps he may even be able to hear the words that I now speak. But let the place of concealment be as good and as cleverly contrived as may be, yet I will undertake to discover it."

The positive air with which Mr. Skellum spoke caused Milly to suffer much real terror.

In her own heart from this moment she gave Dick up for lost.

The baronet did the same, yet both waited with feverish anxiety to learn the result of the officers' movements.

"I wish you luck in your search," said Sir Humphrey; "though, if I spoke my opinion, I should say he is far enough off by this time, and that while you are standing here he is rapidly increasing that distance."

But Skellum shook his head with a very positive air.

"I could almost have sworn that I saw him run into this summer-house."

"Into the summer-house?" echoed Sir Humphrey and his daughter, speaking both together.

"Yes."

"Have you looked?"

"Oh yes. We have just had a peep."

"And he is not there?"

"It seems not," responded Skellum; "but I am by no means certain of it. At any rate, I shall not be satisfied until I have had another good look."

Most fortunate indeed was it that he turned upon his heel at this moment.

Had he not done so he could not have failed to see the great distress into which Milly was plunged by these last words, which seemed to her to be the death-knell of Turpin's hopes.

CHAPTER MCXV.

MR. SKELLUM MISSES HIS PREY BY A HAIR'S BREADTH. SIR HUMPHREY had too good an opinion of the hiding-place to feel afraid that it would be found out very easily, and so he pressed his daughter's arm in a way that he intended should reassure her and followed the police officers into the summer-house.

The first thing they heard after crossing the threshold was a loud exclamation from Mr. Skellum, which seemed to betoken the discovery of something important.

"The light here," he cried—"the light, I say."

The lantern of course was immediately handed to him, and the first use he made of it was to direct the beam of light on to the ground.

"Ah," he cried, "it seems I am right after all."

"What is it—what is it?" asked the baronet, pushing forward.

"Nothing more than a spot of blood, your worship," was the reply. "Look here, it is round and red, and it has not been here long either."

By way of proving that this assertion was correct, he smeared it with his foot, which left no doubt of its liquidity.

"He has been here," he cried. "I thought it odd if I should be mistaken. He is concealed somewhere in or about this building, and with your permission, Sir Humphrey, we will set about finding him."

"Oh, certainly—certainly," answered the baronet, who was aware it would be most unwise to attempt to oppose the police officers in such a matter.

By the steps he now took, Mr. Skellum plainly showed that such business as the present was by no means strange to him.

Some of the men he directed to watch closely the exterior of the structure, while to one he gave particular instructions.

For his own part, he pulled out his discharged pistol, and grasping it by the barrel, used the butt as a hammer. He struck a couple of sharp blows with it upon the wooden wall of the summer-house, beginning close to the door.

The knocks were responded to by the man outside, whom he had told to test the outer side while he tested the inner.

"Go on," he cried—"all right."

The man walked on responding to every blow given by his chief.

The sound was quite sufficient to enable the most inexperienced person to pronounce with certainty as to whether there was any cavity, recess or secret hiding-place in the walls.

The examination went on rapidly, and as the old summer-house was not of very great extent, it follows that they very soon got near the fireplace.

The baronet had by no means reckoned upon such a rigid scrutiny as this, and could hardly hope that the hiding-place would hold out against it.

It was in all ways most unfortunate that the drop of blood should have been seen on the floor, because it was that which changed Skellum's suspicions into certainties.

The fireplace was now reached.

He had not particularly noticed this before, and his first act was to peep up the chimney.

"Is there anyone there?" asked one of his men.

"I think not, for I can see the night sky through the top. However, I'll soon settle the point."

"Dick Turpin," he cried, "I give you warning that I am about to fire a loaded pistol up this chimney. If you are concealed, speak—if not, the consequence will be upon your head, not mine."

With these words he very deliberately drew a pistol and cocked it.

No notice was taken of his summons, and a sufficiently long interval of silence succeeding, he put his arm up the chimney and pulled the trigger.

The report in that confined space was tremendous.

But nothing was brought down save a quantity of soot, which age had made almost as hard as mortar.

The crazy old building shook from the shock, and seemed for a moment as though it would fall to the ground.

The apprehension of this danger was soon over, and then Skellum said:

"He is not there."

This disappointment, if such we may term it, did not cause him to relax his former exertions.

In his own mind he was quite satisfied that Dick was hidden very close at hand, and nothing but care and patience were required to unearth him.

The fireplace came in for a due share of his scrutiny. His first act was to tap at the back of it.

A most unmistakably hollow sound was returned.

"Hallo!" he said, and with the word he knocked again. If possible, the sound was more indicative of the existence of a cavity than it was before.

"Potter!" bawled Skellum.

"Yes, sir," responded the man outside.

"Why the devil don't you answer my knock?"

"I have, sir."

"Knock again."

He listened, and the sound of a blow was heard, but most evidently it was not delivered against the back of the fire-place.

"Your worship," he said, "I have found out the secret at last; I was sure I should do so before very long. But you must give me your permission to look further into this business. Of course I will undertake to do no more damage than I can help."

Milly now was all but in a swoon.

She would have given worlds to get away, yet she could not command herself enough to speak or to make one single movement.

She expected now nothing less than to see Dick Turpin slain before her eyes.

Her father was almost as discomposed as she was; and it was, perhaps, more because he fancied he ought to speak than any other cause, that made him say:

"What was it you thought of doing, Mr. Skellum?"

"I shall be compelled, your worship, in the faithful discharge of my duty, to break into the hiding-place which I am sure exists here."

"Oh, very well—of course," muttered Sir Humphrey, not knowing what other words to make use of.

Being convinced that there was some means of gaining a ready access to this place of concealment caused Mr. Skellum to look narrowly for some kind of secret fastening.

While thus engaged, that chink through which Dick had seen the light of the lantern was presently discovered.

"Here we have it! Now, my lads, keep a sharp lookout round the outside, and if he attempts to run away shoot him down! We will stand no more nonsense!"

So saying, Mr. Skellum drew the heavy cutlass he carried by his side and inserted the point in the crevice we have mentioned.

Then using the weapon as a lever, he succeeded in forcing open the hidden doorway, which, as it was not secured by any spring or snap, caused but very little trouble.

A small recess like a closet was then disclosed, about large enough for a man to stand upright in.

But the recess was empty.

Milly had closed her eyes, determined not to be a witness of the slaughter of the man she had befriended; and when she opened them again she could scarcely believe that she saw aright.

By what unaccountable magic had the highwayman contrived to disappear?

Mr. Skellum was disconcerted for the moment, but we must do him the justice to state that it was for the moment only.

"The light," he cried—"show me the light, and don't relax your vigilance in the least!"

But before we describe the further proceedings of the officers we will return to Dick and give some account of his actions.

No sooner, then, was he conscious that his foes had quitted the old summer-house on the first occasion than he turned round and felt the walls of the recess, wondering whether there was any other means of leaving it than that by which he had entered.

He devoutly hoped such would prove to be the case, and he had tolerable good grounds for the indulgence of this hope, for he remembered what the baronet was saying when he interrupted him.

But his hands enabled him to make no discovery.

When he turned his back to the fireplace he all at once became aware that fresh air was blowing lightly upon his face.

This pointed in the same direction as his hopes, and seemed to go to show that there was an outlet at no great distance.

With a view of reaching the back of the recess, he put his foot forward, and it was well for him that he exercised some caution in putting it down.

It was the fear lest his foes should hear him that made him unusually careful, and he congratulated himself upon his prudence, for he could find no resting-place to put his foot upon.

He was, in fact, standing at the top of a rudely-made staircase which descended very precipitously.

When Dick made this discovery his heart leaped with joy.

Without more ado he commenced making a descent, using the utmost caution in all his progress and keeping his one hand well extended before him to guard against coming into sudden contact with any object.

It was no slight thing thus to make his way through the total darkness in a place that he was utterly unacquainted with.

For aught he knew, some terrible peril might lie in his path, and he be unconscious of it until too late.

It was but rarely Dick was without the means of procuring a light.

Unfortunately, this was one of those rare occasions, and in consequence he wasted much valuable time, for in progressing as he did twice as much time was taken as would have been consumed had he only been able to see before him.

He was much encouraged by the fact that as he advanced the rush of cold air was more and more sensible, which convinced him he was making his way towards the outlet.

Suddenly, however, to his inexpressible astonishment, this ceased.

He stopped, wondering what could be the cause of so strange a circumstance.

There was no doubt about it—the air ceased to blow upon his face.

A great dread now came over him—one that for a moment deprived him of all motion.

This was, that by some means or other his foes had learned the whereabouts of the outlet, and had closed it.

At this reflection he leant against the wall for support.

He felt giddy and sick, and no wonder, for he had lost a great quantity of blood.

The ensanguined fluid was indeed even now escaping in much greater quantity than he was aware of.

Some moments elapsed before he could make up his mind what to do, when luckily a fresh idea occurred to him.

In obedience to it, he turned and retraced his steps.

Presently, as he had almost been afraid to expect, he felt the fresh air again blowing upon him.

This convinced him that he must on the former occasion have passed some branching-off passage which communicated with the open air, and kept along the one that doubtless led to a secret doorway in some apartment in the Hall.

Like most other people at that time, Dick knew very well that there was scarcely a dwelling of any importance and antiquity throughout the land that was unprovided with at least one secret means of exit, and that this was a secret means of communication with the Hall he was perfectly certain.

Using more care than on the former occasion, when indeed his principal aim had been to keep on in a straight direction, he proceeded until he came to a corner where another passage appeared to branch off at right angles.

As it was so profoundly dark, and as he was in too much haste to observe these things closely, he had no very clear notion of the place.

The air blew on his face, and he was content.

Heedless of the danger there might be in doing so, he ran on with extended arms, hoping to make up for the precious moments that had been lost.

In point of fact, the time to him seemed very much greater than it was in reality.

A few moments more, and to his great joy he perceived a faint glimmer of twilight in advance—so faint that no one could have described it unless after being in total darkness as long as Dick had.

He quickened his steps, and soon after emerged on the side of a little hill which formed one side of a dingle or large dell, which was thickly covered with thorn-bearing bushes.

So well did these conceal the entrance to the secret passage that, after Dick emerged and turned round, he was unable to perceive it.

Just then, such a fearful sensation of sickness came over him that he had much difficulty in saving himself from falling.

A kind of stupor, or state of semi-consciousness, followed.

But the knowledge of his imminent peril never left him, and it was this knowledge which enabled him, after a brief interval, to shake off in some degree the oppressiveness which weighed him down.

He knew, too, what was the cause of this deathlike sensation, and his first act was to take the neckcloth and fold it up something in the form of a surgical bandage.

When this was done, it was no easy task to bind up his left arm in such a way as to check the effusion of blood, nor did he succeed, though he managed to stop the flow to a very great extent.

He listened.

From the silence which reigned around, he ventured to hope that his foes had once more lost his trail, and it was this hope which animated him to make all the exertion he could to get away from the spot.

Leaving him for a brief space to struggle on through the baronet's domain, we will return to the summer-

house, because some events took place there that were of a very startling character indeed.

It will be recollected that Mr. Skellum had called aloud for a light.

The lantern was handed to him, and he plunged with it into the recess.

But before he had time to make any examination, he was startled by loud cries of alarm issuing from the lips of those behind him.

When he first heard these cries he naturally enough jumped to the conclusion that Dick Turpin was the cause of it.

Therefore he drew back with great alacrity.

But at the first glance he saw into how great a mistake he had fallen.

The summer-house was in flames.

So intent had everybody been upon the discovery at the fireplace that the blaze was not at first noticed.

The fire spread, however, with lightning-like rapidity.

The summer-house was, in fact, composed of roofing but wood; and by many long years of exposure to the elements it had become as dry and inflammable as paper.

Even by the time Mr. Skellum had drawn back and taken a first glance the fury of the flames so much increased, and the heat generated was so intense, that all were glad to draw back and make what speed they could across the threshold.

Indeed, had a light been applied to a quantity of shavings, the fire could not have spread with more swiftness and vigour.

The first inquiry was as to the origin of the conflagration; but this was a point upon which they were not long in doubt.

From the spot where the fire had first been observed to break out, it was tolerably clear that the cause lay in the pistol which Mr. Skellum had rather foolishly fired up the chimney.

In all probability, the fire had been communicated by a burning wax falling upon the woodwork, which, once alight, burned with a rapidity that appeared incredible to those who were actually witnesses of it.

To enter the summer-house became in less than a moment an impossibility, and, indeed, so great was the heat that it compelled them, though outside, to retire to a respectful distance.

The unexpectedness of this event produced a great deal of confusion.

As may be expected, Skellum was one of the first to recover.

Yet, by the time he had collected his faculties the summer-house was one mass of flames from top to bottom.

It roared like a furnace, and thousands of sparks flew into the air.

"This is a d—d annoying thing!" were his first words. "Excuse me for saying so, your worship, but what could have been more annoying?"

"I am greatly vexed, I confess," said Sir Humphrey, "for the old place was a great favourite of mine, and I would not willingly have had it destroyed. I am d—nably afraid, too, that it will set fire to some of the trees."

"We will try and prevent that, your worship," replied Skellum, "though the danger is greater than I had at first considered it."

As the trees grew very closely indeed round the summer-house, there was a good deal of fear that the fire would be communicated to them.

Little of an active character could, however, be done.

There was no water near at hand, and no means of getting any from the pool without going first to the Hall to obtain buckets for the purpose.

In the opinion of all present, long before this could be done the summer-house would be reduced to ashes.

The greatest fury of the fire, too, was now over, and as it by degrees abated, the apprehensions that the wood would be fired grew much less.

So rapidly did the whole affair take place that certainly not more than twelve minutes elapsed from the moment when the outbreak of fire was discovered until of the whole nothing remained but a mass of red-hot smouldering embers which cast up dense volumes of smoke.

Mr. Skellum did not value the old summer-house one rush; but he was terribly put about to think such an obstacle should have placed itself in the way of his pursuit of Dick, who, as he rightly dreaded was by this time far enough off.

Yet where to look for him he knew not.

Nothing had been seen or heard, and the only consolation he could find lay in the reflection that it was just possible Dick was still under earth, unable to emerge in consequence of the conflagration.

That he was doomed to be disappointed in this respect the reader knows well enough already.

About the existence of the recess and knowledge of where it led the baronet professed the most profound ignorance, and Skellum, with all his impudence, did not venture to doubt the truth of what he stated.

So soon as the fire was subdued, or, rather, had exhausted itself for want of further material, he plunged among the ruins and busily set to work to remove the mass of rubbish which had fallen over where the fireplace had stood.

In this rather unpleasant task he was well assisted by his men, who could not for shame's sake hold back when their leader set them the example of working.

Yet it was most difficult, not to say dangerous, for the wood, when it came to be disturbed much below the surface, was red-hot, while clouds of the most suffocating and pungent smoke continued to arise.

The opening had been partially choked up, but not so completely as to prevent Mr. Skellum from seeing that there were steps leading downwards into the earth.

This discovery seemed to impart additional vigour to his movements.

In less time than might be thought the passage was entirely cleared.

He was the first to set the example of descending.

In one hand he held the cutlass with which he had been so busily at work—in the other was the dark lantern.

The cool, fresh air in the subterranean passage was most delightful after the smoke in which they had been working above.

Having the advantage of a light, it by no means took Mr. Skellum so long to make his way along the passage as it had Dick.

In fact, he reached the point where the passage divided in something like half the length of time.

But seeing two paths before him instead of one, Mr. Skellum paused in uncertainty.

Which way to go he knew not.

There was nothing that would serve as any indication of the route the fugitive might have taken.

In this dilemma Mr. Skellum did the wisest thing under the circumstances.

This was to divide the force into two equal portions, allowing one-half to take one direction, the other another.

He himself almost by chance placed himself at the head of those who made their way towards the open air.

When he felt the cool wind fanning his flushed body, Mr. Skellum's apprehensions were increased.

He was sadly afraid that the delay which from one cause or another had taken place had allowed Dick to get off altogether.

But remembering that he had wounded him, these fears considerably abated.

A few more minutes brought him to the end of the passage, and then he found himself about half-way down the side of the dell where Dick had had so narrow an escape from swooning.

Here he found abundant evidence that he was on the right track, for on the ground close by was quite a pool of blood.

This was where Dick had stood while he bound up his wound.

"He must have been here a very few minutes ago, sir," said one of the men; "the blood is quite warm."

Skellum looked keenly around him.

But no signs of the fugitive could he behold.

"There is one comfort," he said, though by the tone of his voice one would have judged that his comfort was small: "a man who has lost such a quantity of blood of his veins as that will not be able to go very far."



[DICK TURPIN EMPLORES SHELTER OF THE FARMER.]

fast, so that we shall have him, after all; and when we have really got him secure we shall think little of all the trouble we have had."

"That's true enough, sir," said the man who had before spoken; "and it is a very strange thing to me if we shall not be able to follow in his track with the utmost ease."

CHAPTER MCXVI.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN FINDS UNEXPECTED SUCCOUR.

DICK TURPIN staggered on for a long way without once turning his head to look behind him, for all his faculties were absorbed by one idea, and that was, to get as far as he could in as little time as was possible.

Sheer exhaustion, however, at length made him, though most unwittingly, come to a halt.

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It was only natural that he should then look back towards the spot he had so lately quitted.

He was instantly startled by the ruddy glow of the sky.

"Something is on fire," he ejaculated. "What is it?"

To this question he was unable to return any certain answer.

He little guessed that it was the old summer-house in course of demolition by fire, and even had he guessed this he would have been far, very far, from thinking that this accidental circumstance had caused so much delay to his pursuers.

But for this chance he could scarcely have failed to be overtaken before he had gone far.

Even now there was the strongest probability that this disaster would ere long befall him.

His weakness was terrible—much greater than he would admit to himself.

While taking his forced rest he seemed to be fully sensible that the longer he stood the weaker he became—the less able he felt to continue his flight.

Without knowing it, he was very close indeed upon swooning from loss of blood.

A sudden effort of the mind, however, enabled him partially and temporarily to shake off this feeling, and he once more staggered on.

His gait and progress were just those of a drunken man.

Every now and then he would reel from side to side, or with a desperate effort steady his swaying form by suddenly taking hold of a contiguous tree.

And, as a matter of course, the more he thus exerted his bodily powers the greater became his exhaustion.

By slow degrees consciousness ebbed from him, yet not to so great an extent as to deprive him of all power of locomotion, though his course was a most random and devious one.

But the uppermost idea in his mind still was that he must keep in motion.

As for his pursuers, he seemed to have forgotten them altogether—at any rate, he did not once pause or cast a single glance behind him.

Under these circumstances, as may be expected, his course was a most erratic one.

Then a mist seemed to come over all things.

Yet he groped blindly forward, like one enveloped in utter darkness.

How long this state continued he had no means of knowing, but most likely it was not for long.

Suddenly the mist before his vision rolled away.

The first object which now attracted his attention was a light.

Feeble, glimmering, and dim it seemed, and far away, yet Dick fixed his eyes upon it with an intentness not to be described.

His hope was that this light was the indication of rest and shelter shortly to be granted to him.

Had his faculties been less confused than they were, he would scarcely have imagined the likelihood of such a thing as this.

As it was, he fancied there was a voice in his heart which whispered to him, urging him to make all speed towards the light.

He did so, and for a time he rallied a little from his faintness.

At last, leaning against the trunk of a tree, he wiped the perspiration from his brow, and endeavoured to take a good outlook in advance.

"It is a fire," he gasped, with the manner of one who finds himself unable to credit the evidence of his senses. "It is a fire—a fire of some kind. What can it be?"

He gazed with more intentness, and to his great joy he found his sight grew clearer.

A wild sensation of joy sprang up in his breast—so wild that it was very near producing the worst circumstances.

"Gipsies," he exclaimed, panting with excitement. "I am sure that's a gipsy encampment yonder. Courage—courage, then—keep your heart up, Dick, and all will yet be well!"

The discovery he had made did indeed exert a remarkable influence upon him.

Under its sway much of his old strength came back to him.

"All will be well—all will be well now," he cried, almost frenzied with joy. "The gipsies have ever shown themselves to be real and true friends of mine. Yes, yes—all will yet be well. My enemies will again be disappointed, for the Zingari, as I know for certain, will run every risk to shield and to protect."

Certainly, if there was anything that would have the effect of restoring vigour to Dick's flagging energies the prospect before him would have been sufficient.

Indeed, an extraordinary accession of strength did come over him, and he made his way towards the light with a precision and a speed that, judging by his former manner, would have been deemed absolutely impossible.

And as he advanced it became abundantly manifest that he had not fallen into any error.

In a short time he was able to make out not only the fire, but three poles placed triangularly above it, from which swung a large iron pot.

Round this were assembled several members of the gipsy tribe.

On one side could be seen a portion of the tents forming their encampment.

More and more animated, Dick staggered on.

But he was obliged to confess that his mind, though for a short time capable of displaying a supremacy over his body, was indeed the weaker of the two, and now it began to yield very perceptibly to his physical faculties.

The goal, however, was almost reached.

A mist, seemingly like blood, would at more and more frequent intervals come before his eyes, but yet it did not hide from his view the point he so strongly wished to gain.

A very little more time now brought him within a few paces of the fire, and not until he had attained this proximity were the gipsies conscious of his presence, so totally were they all absorbed by some matter which they had under discussion.

Dick, too, at this juncture felt that the extent of his powers had been reached.

He knew that his senses were leaving him, yet ere consciousness entirely took its flight he endeavoured to give utterance to his wishes—to make his supplication for their assistance and protection.

But the effort was a vain one.

His attempt to articulate—and it was a desperate one—produced no other result than the expression of a gasping, choking sound, half sob, half sigh.

Then he struggled, and, as it were, seemed to be fighting with himself.

Then he slowly spun round upon his heels, seeming to make frantic efforts to clutch at and hold by the unsubstantial air.

Then finally, with another of those gasping sounds, he fell down heavily on his back upon the sward, where he lay as motionless as death.

So sudden, so unexpected was his appearance—so entirely unprepared were all the gipsies for the occurrence of any such event, that up to this moment they had been absolutely incapable of all motion.

Now, however, as if by general consent, they all sprang up, and, with exclamations of wonder and surprise upon their lips, hurried to the spot where the inanimate stranger lay.

Keen and scrutinising were the glances which they bent upon him, and by the glances they exchanged after having done so it appeared that the new-comer was utterly unknown to them.

But a slim, active youth—the last to appear upon the scene—pressed forward as soon as the rest, having satisfied their curiosity, would allow him to do so.

With great intentness he scanned every lineament, and as he did so there came over his face an expression which seemed to indicate that the rigid features were known to him.

"You have seen this house-dweller before, Sebel?" said a swarthy, powerful gipsy, who stood next to him.

"I have," was the response—"I feel sure I have."

"But where?"

Sebel was silent.

"Can you not remember?"

"I cannot; and yet, stay! I feel convinced—though it is long, long ago—that this stranger once came to us, and on that occasion he was accompanied by one who bore no inconsiderable resemblance to him."

"And what was the object of his visit?"

"Shelter and concealment."

These words were echoed inquiringly and surprisedly by most of those who were standing near, and it was observable that the whole group pressed much more closely onward than before.

The reason was simple.

They were all dominated by the strongest curiosity.

"Yes," said Sebel, emphatically, "I feel sure that I am right—that I make no mistake."

"And was he concealed?"

"He was."

"And broke bread with us?" was the eager inquiry.

"Even so."

"You are sure of this?"

"Quite sure now—quite sure."

"Enough," was the general cry—"we are bound to assist him to the utmost of our power."

"And he badly enough needs aid," continued Sebel. "No doubt, had he been able, he would have called upon us to shield him from his foes."

Although Dick lay so still upon the grass, apparently bereft of life, yet there was not one of those who gazed upon him that was not aware that it was not death, but only death's counterfeit.

"Carry him to the tent," said the gipsy of whom we have made mention. "We will do for him all that lies in our power. If he is not saved, it will be no fault of ours."

Indeed, it was strange to see how unanimous was the opinion that Dick had every claim upon their sympathy while in his present situation, and all because he had, to use their own phrase, broken bread with their tribe, which indeed almost sufficed to make him a member of their strange fraternity.

Accordingly the senseless fugitive was lifted up and carried into the largest tent, where preparations were at once made properly to dress his wound and also to restore him to his senses.

Fortunate indeed was it for Dick that chance had guided his footsteps to this particular place, and that he had strength enough to reach it.

He could not possibly have fallen into better hands.

Many were the secrets possessed by the gipsies in the healing art, especially where hurts and wounds were concerned.

And not only in this respect was it that he was well off.

The gipsies who gave him shelter were, like himself, opposed to the police—their enemy was a common one.

In both of these respects, then, was Dick much better off than he could have dared to hope.

They would defend him to the last gasp, and not only that—they were possessed of all that cunning which has passed into a proverb, and the whole of it would be brought to bear as much in Dick's behalf as it would have been had he actually become a member of their brotherhood.

To recover the fugitive from his state of insensibility was in the first place no easy task, in consequence of the entire prostration of the system, which could be only got the better of in time.

Sensibility was restored for a moment or so, but the recovery was so slight, and was followed so rapidly by a relapse, as to make it scarcely worthy of the name.

"Nature must do her work," said the old crone who officiated as physician for that portion of the tribe. "No art can restore his expended energies; there must be time—time and patience."

But this did not stay her from unbandaging the wound, which upon examination proved to be by no means so serious as was at first thought.

The chief danger consisted in the tremendous quantity of blood which had escaped from it, and from this further ill consequences were to be apprehended.

But the manner in which the old gipsy set about her task would have done the greatest credit to a skillful surgeon.

She had barely finished, however, when a fresh arrival took place.

The new-comer was young, slim, and light of build, but with muscles like wire.

Great excitement was visible in his manner.

He had been running hard, too, as was abundantly manifested by the way in which he panted for breath.

As soon as he could speak he exclaimed:

"Off—off! Strike your tents and depart—linger no longer! Quick—quick!"

An immediate stir followed these words, as though those who heard them fully felt that there was danger to be apprehended and not a moment to be lost.

"What has happened—what is amiss?" asked many eager voices.

"The Robin Redbreasts are abroad," was the reply—"they are forcing a way through dell and brake. Quick—quick! Away—away, or they will be in sight."

The message was well understood.

At that time, "Robin Redbreast" was a cant name for a police officer—a term which had its origin in the red waistcoat they invariably wore, and which served in lieu of a uniform to distinguish them from other men.

Whether the gipsies had lately been engaged in some

transaction which caused them to be in more than a dread of the officers of justice we know not.

But by the commotion which the delivery of this intelligence occasioned, and the speedy preparations which were made on every side for an immediate and hasty flight, there seemed good grounds for suspecting such to be the case.

In much less time than would be considered requisite for such an undertaking, every article which the gipsies possessed was carefully packed up, the tents were struck, and the horses harnessed to the caravans.

At a given signal the whole started, leaving scarcely a trace behind them to indicate the route which they had taken.

As for poor Dick Turpin, he was as insensible and unconscious of all this as he would have been had death really and truly claimed him for his own.

Perfectly unaware of any such thing, he was carried from the tent to which he had first been taken, and placed in one of the caravans, as those strange yellow-painted houses on wheels are called.

Such an act as this, and the prospect of a journey of indefinite length, would have terribly alarmed a regular practitioner, who would have maintained that perfect repose was absolutely necessary in such a case, and that without it he would not be answerable for the consequences.

But if Dick Turpin had been ever so much averse to such a proceeding as the present, it would have been quite useless, the safety of the tribe being always held paramount above every individual consideration.

As we have said, however, all was one to the fugitive at this time. If the gipsies had chosen to deliver him into the hands of his perincacious foes, he could not have made the least resistance.

The antagonism, however, which we have mentioned as existing between these two parties made the probabilities of the occurrence of such a danger very slight indeed.

How long a time elapsed since he had quitted the old summer-house, and what had precisely happened to him, Dick Turpin scarcely knew.

He only found it out after his recovery, by dint of much anxious thought and eager questioning.

But about the occurrence of one incident he was in no sort of doubt whatever.

Without knowing how, he discovered that he could hear the sound of conversation going on around him.

At first in a dream-like, semi-conscious way he was sensible of this fact, and barely so, when the pronunciation of his own name struck upon his ears.

That had the effect of immediately startling him.

He opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

Where was he?

That was the anxious question which first of all occurred to him.

He tried to gaze around him.

But in vain.

He was environed by the deepest darkness.

So far as the evidence of his eyes went, therefore, he might just as well have kept them closely shut.

In what situation he was seemed impossible for him to ascertain.

But the darkness appeared to have the effect of sharpening his hearing to a preternatural extent.

He listened, therefore, with great eagerness.

There was to be heard more than sufficient to absorb the whole of his faculties.

The first words which he distinctly heard—or, at least, the first whose import he was able thoroughly to comprehend—were these:

"Let me tell you," said a voice, in very resolute tones, "that you will gain nothing by deceiving us or attempting to do so."

"We don't think about such a thing," was the somewhat surly-spoken rejoinder, though the voice, Dick was thoroughly persuaded, was one which he had never heard in his life before.

His wonder and anxiety increased.

He had no time to reflect, however, for all his faculties were fully absorbed by listening.

"Then," said the voice which had first spoken, "do you assure us that you have seen no one answering to the description we have given?"

"Have I not spoken?" was the rejoinder.

"You have, but that is not an answer to the question."

"Then, if you will take the word of a gipsy, I tell you we know nothing of the man you seek—we have seen nothing of him."

"That seems strange indeed, and were it not for a reader belief would be given. But we have tracked him so very close to where you have lately been that it seems scarcely possible for you not to have seen him."

"We have not done so," was the answer, very firmly and very resolutely given; "nor do we know anything about this highwayman, Dick Turpin, that you speak of. We are on our way to York, near to which city we have to meet another portion of our tribe, and there you will find us if you want to learn anything further."

Some more words passed.

But they were exchanged in so low a tone that Dick was not able to distinguish them.

But the word "gipsy" had, so to speak, struck upon his ears like a keynote.

It furnished him with the clue to past events that he was short of.

He recollected perfectly well what had last occurred, though the profound darkness prevented him from finding out where he was.

The voice which he had first heard was familiar enough to him.

Scarcely anyone could have heard its peculiar harshness without retaining a distinct remembrance of it ever after.

It was Skellum who was speaking.

Although he could not make out a single object, yet in imagination Dick could see plainly enough a large troop of well-armed, resolute police officers standing round.

From what had been said, it seemed quite clear that the gipsies had determined to stand by him.

But would the officers be satisfied with taking what was declared for granted?

The occurrence of this question made him think that he could give a good guess as to where he was.

"Yes, yes," he said, mentally—"during my insensibility, the gipsies became aware of the approach of the officers, and have placed me in some secret place where there is little danger of my being found. All I have to do is to remain perfectly still, and then doubtless all will be well."

Dick's brain was not very clear, or he would not have jumped to conclusions which a little calm reflection would show to be erroneous.

How should the gipsies know that the officers were in pursuit of him, and why should they trouble to hide him when he had given no hint that he required such a service at their hands?

Perhaps it was quite as well, however, that Dick should have settled the matter thus, because it had the effect of inducing him to remain perfectly still, which, under the circumstances, was the one thing needful.

A variety of noises now made themselves heard, and then came the sound of horses' hoofs, mingled with the rumbling of revolving wheels.

The next moment, to Dick's increased surprise, he found himself in motion.

There could be no doubt of the fact.

Of course he was in a vehicle of some kind, but what he could not guess.

The reader may perhaps imagine what anxiety took possession of his mind.

So great was the inclination he felt to look about him that it was only with the utmost difficulty he could control it.

The rumbling and jolting continued.

Where was he?

His uneasiness upon this point at last reached so great a pitch as to be unendurable.

At all hazards he resolved to make an effort to ascertain the nature of his surroundings.

But a very simple thing prevented him.

He tried to rise from the recumbent position in which he found himself.

But all his efforts could not raise his head above a couple of inches, and then he had to allow it to fall back into its old position, so much had the exertion exhausted him.

His alarm consequent upon this discovery was terrible indeed.

The thought that he was so powerless to help himself was a terrible one to bear.

If the officers by chance looked into the conveyance and found him, he would not be able so much as to raise a finger in his defence—his foes would be able to do with him what they pleased.

This prospect was to him such a dreadful one that his heart seemed to congeal into a mass of ice within his breast.

Truly it may be said that there was nothing Dick dreaded so much as falling alive into the hands of his enemies.

He had made up his mind to fling away his life rather than yield himself a living prisoner.

But if they came now, what should he do?

He listened, but with sensations such as cannot be conceived except by one in a similar situation.

He was by no means certain that the police officers were not within a few yards of where he then was, for he had not heard any sound betokening their departure.

It might be that the gipsies had driven on, leaving them in consultation together upon the road, and if this was the case, what was more possible than that the result of their deliberation might be to ride back to the gipsies and insist upon satisfying their doubts by making a strict search?

As these reflections crowded into his mind, Dick became more and more uneasy and alarmed.

CHAPTER MCXVII.

MR. SKELLUM IS COMPELLED TO CONFESS HIMSELF DEFEATED.

A VERY few words will suffice to make the reader acquainted with the movements of the officers after emerging from the secret passage in the hill-side.

No trace of Dick was to be seen; but Skellum was sanguine in his expectations of overtaking him, and therefore commenced a pursuit on foot.

His men, who were terribly fatigued, grumbled a good deal at this, and in order to preserve among them that amount of good feeling without the existence of which his plans could not have been carried out, Mr. Skellum despatched one of their number to the spot where the horses had been left, giving him instructions to mount and bring the rest with him as quickly as possible.

This arrangement being made, there was not much difficulty in persuading those who remained to push forward on foot until they were overtaken by the horses, which would be in a very short time indeed.

They all saw that it was much better for them not to relax their efforts just at that juncture, as it was quite possible Dick was lurking among the bushes close at hand.

To track him, however, was no easy matter, for, having bound up his arm in the way we have described, Dick left no trail of sufficient distinctness for them to follow.

Moreover, what made their task all the more difficult was the very erratic course Dick had taken while half unconscious from loss of blood.

His wanderings had indeed been most perplexing and uncertain.

And yet he had been under the impression, too, that all the time he had been making his way in a perfectly straight direction.

At length, to the great relief of the police officers, to whose fatigue disappointment had not a little contributed, the horses overtook them.

Getting into the saddle, they continued the chase, until at length, when almost ready to give up in despair, they perceived a horse emerge from a lane into the high-road.

Of course a man was with it, and as this was the first chance they had had of speaking to any living being since the time of leaving the subterranean passage, the officers pressed forward with great eagerness, in the hope of gleaming some intelligence.

They were disappointed, for the horse was one of those belonging to the gipsies, and before the officer-

could reach the spot the whole of the tribe had debouched into the high-road.

Then ensued that conversation of which Dick had recovered in time to hear the greatest portion.

It may be that the sudden jerk, consequent upon the stoppage of the conveyance, had something to do with producing this result.

The fidelity of the gipsies was extraordinary.

Although made acquainted for the first time with the name of the fugitive to whom they had lent their protection, and although Mr. Skellum particularly dwelt upon the reward which would be paid to anyone who delivered him into the hands of the officers of justice, they remained steadfast and true.

Dick Turpin had broken bread with them, and the peculiar laws which bind their fraternity together would not suffer them to betray him.

After some time Skellum allowed them to proceed, as the reader already is aware, for there was nothing to afford reasonable ground for suspicion in their behaviour.

Yet, as he sat upon his horse wondering what step he should take next, and in what direction he should go, he gazed with a strange, indefinable longing after the retiring vehicles until a bend in the road hid them from his view.

Even then, had he chosen to act blindly and wholly from impulse, he would have ridden off after them; but he could find so little, or, rather, no excuse for doing so, that he abandoned the idea altogether.

From this it would almost seem that there was some secret presentiment in his breast, but yet not strong enough to cause him to act in accordance with it.

His men remained for some time silent.

Perceiving that their leader did not move, and that he exhibited some signs of irresolution, one said:

"What are we to do next, Mr. Skellum?"

"I don't know," was the unsatisfactory answer.

There was a pause.

"I am sadly afraid," he continued, "that we have lost him. It is a thousand pities we have done so, for after having lost such an immoderate quantity of blood as we have positive evidence of, it is impossible that he can have got very far away."

"What do you think he has done, then?"

"Why, my own opinion is that he has crawled into some retired nook or other, where we have missed him."

This seemed a very probable supposition indeed, and the opinion was shared in by all without exception.

"It is a thousand pities if he has done so," continued Mr. Skellum, musingly; "because, in the event of it, he will die there, and we shall have no hope of getting recompensed for all the trouble we have been at. In his present condition I feel sure he would not be able to get away again."

Another silence followed, which might have lasted longer than it did had it not been broken by the officer who had been the first to speak in the former instance.

"But what shall we do?" he asked. "I speak for myself, and I think I can do so for all the rest."

"What do you mean—in what way?"

"Why, I am so utterly worn out that I feel every moment as though I must fall off my horse on to the ground."

"And I—and I," answered a chorus of voices.

The men by no means exaggerated, for the duty they had been upon for so long was tiring in the utmost degree.

Mr. Skellum himself was all but worn out; and, indeed, the only thing that had prevented him from giving out before was, that he feared, if he did so, all his previous trouble would go for nothing.

Now, however, there seemed no help for it, and consequently, with much less unwillingness than might have been expected, he agreed to abandon the pursuit for the present and seek rest.

The only consolation he could find lay in the hope that he might chance to have some intelligence brought to him, for the whole country was so alarmed that it was scarcely possible for Dick once to show himself without being recognised.

Accordingly, the whole of the troop repaired to the

nearest inn on the high-road, and there refreshed themselves with the food and slumber they were so much in want of.

In the meantime Dick was being gradually carried further and further away from them.

As moment after moment elapsed without making him conscious of any aggressive proceedings on the part of the officers, much of his alarm began to abate.

Yet, before the feeling had quite left him, a fresh and altogether different cause of uneasiness presented itself.

All at once it came into his head that he had heard the gipsies inform the police officers that they were on their way to York.

The confusion of mind he was in when he had heard it, and the anxiety which he had suffered since, had driven this circumstance entirely out of his remembrance.

Now that it occurred to him he wondered greatly how he could have passed it over in the way he had.

Of all places in the world just at that time, York was the very worst that he could be taken to.

His own achievements in the locality were doubtless on every tongue; and the police officers, in their minute inquiries and continual search, had unquestionably circulated a tolerably accurate description of his person.

Should his evil fortune take him to this city, he felt that it would be well-nigh an impossibility for him to escape detection.

So strongly impressed did he become with this idea, that it caused him to resolve to make the attempt to prevent it.

He would call out aloud. There could be no danger in his doing so now that the police were so far behind; and if he made good use of his voice, the gipsies could hardly fail to hear him.

Accordingly, he raised his voice—or rather, he tried to do so, for all his efforts only resulted in the emission of a sound not much above a whisper.

Such a low, hoarse sound could scarcely be heard at a few yards' distance.

How was it likely, then, that it should be audible to the gipsies, who were walking along, conversing busily respecting their encounter with the officers and speculating upon its probable results?

Even had he cried out with the full power of his lungs, it is very doubtful whether it could have been heard above the tremendous grinding and rumbling of the wheels.

Yet Dick tried and tried again and again.

He renewed his efforts to rise, but with less success than before, for his anxiety of mind and previous efforts had greatly exhausted him.

At length, with a weary and heavy sigh, he threw back his half-raised body and gave up in despair.

"It is fate," he murmured—"it is fate."

A strange, drowsy condition followed, during which his thoughts appeared to busy themselves without being under his control.

Looking back to the past, he was struck with the fatality which had hitherto attended his efforts to get away from York.

He could almost fancy that he was under the influence of some spell or charm.

And now, on this last occasion, when he had, as he thought, bidden adieu to the old city for ever, yet here he was being brought back to it, and in a way that it was in vain for him to attempt to resist.

"It is fate," he murmured again—"I feel that it is fate. I shall attempt to leave it no more."

A commotion of voices and a sudden jerk awoke him from what we may call his waking dream.

Where was he?

On this point he was not destined to remain for very long in ignorance.

After the lapse of a few minutes the door at the hind part of the caravan was opened, and a gleam of light appeared.

"Hullo, there!" said a gruff voice. "Are you awake there?"

Conceiving the question must be addressed to him, Dick replied:

"Yes—yes."

But his voice was so weak as to be scarcely audible.

"Here, Cazza," said the gruff voice—"I told you you were troubling yourself about nothing. Come in—he's all right."

Another person now entered the caravan; and directly afterwards Dick caught sight of an old woman, whose appearance was so repulsive that he could scarcely repress the loathing which her appearance excited.

She bent down over him, while her companion held the light, and looked at him attentively.

"He is bad," she said, at length, shaking her head to and fro while she spoke—"very bad. He has been struggling and chafing since I left him."

Dick tried to speak, but all utterance failed him.

The old woman then produced a cup containing some dark liquor, and without speaking a word she placed this to Dick's lips and poured it into his mouth.

To save himself from choking he was obliged to swallow; but a more nauseous potion he thought had never been administered.

But ere half an hour had elapsed he experienced the virtues of it.

Upon making the attempt, he found himself not only able to lift his head, but even to raise himself to a sitting posture.

His voice, too, had been restored to him.

Some moments, however, were occupied in looking around him, at the many strange things which presented themselves to view on every side.

The caravan was crowded with articles of every conceivable description, many of them such as he had never seen before.

The place, too, was not without a certain air of comfort.

He was interrupted by the entrance of the youth Sebel.

Dick did not recognise him at first, though he was instantly aware that he had somewhere seen him in times long past.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Your face is strongly familiar to me."

"Have you forgotten me? My name is Sebel."

"Sebel—Sebel!" repeated Dick, like one who is taxing his memory.

"I find you have forgotten me. But when you saw before another was with you, who—who—"

Dick smiled, and extended his unwounded arm.

"I recollect, now," he said—"recollect quite well. I am deeply grateful. Tell me where I am, and what has happened."

With the last portion of his request the gipsy-boy readily complied.

Dick congratulated himself upon having had strength sufficient to reach this place of safety.

"And we are at York now?"

"Not in the city," was the response; "though our tents are not far from it."

Dick's face clouded.

"I must get away," he said. "I cannot remain here. I am not safe."

"Yes, yes; quite safe. Have no concern on that score."

"But the officers—"

"We will not betray you; not one would do it, were the reward ten times what it is."

"You shall all be rewarded for your fidelity. But if my toes came, would they not find me?"

"No no; do not make yourself uneasy on that account. We could hide you where they would never find you."

This was satisfactory enough, and Dick drew a long breath of exquisite relief, for he knew enough of the manners of these wandering people to feel certain that if they chose to protect him he should be safe.

"But there is another point," he continued, "upon which I suffer much uneasiness."

"What is it, captain?"

"About my wound."

"I—"

"Hush! I want you to tell me truthfully and honestly what kind of a wound it is, and what is the probable extent of danger?"

"To speak the entire truth, then, captain, Cazza considers it a very bad flesh wound."

"There is no bone broken, then?"

"None, captain."

"That's a relief indeed."

"But she says you are in a great state of exhaustion,

and that it will take time and care to bring you round."

"And she thinks she can do it?"

"She is certain; that is, if you will assist her by keeping your mind as calm as you can."

"And how long will it take, under favourable circumstances?"

"Many days."

Dick sighed.

At this moment Cazza entered, and peremptorily put an end to the conversation.

Upon first hearing that some time must elapse before his recovery, Dick had felt inclined to repine, but a moment's consideration went very far towards convincing him that he ought to rejoice instead.

Upon the word of the boy Sebel he put an absolute trust.

Safety, then, was secured to him, and if he continued any length of time concealed, without the officers being able to scent it out, the vigour of their pursuit would be much diminished, and his chances of getting to the sea coast much increased.

The only point was, would the officers find him?

If so, they would come upon him in a defenceless state indeed.

When three days passed, however, without the occurrence of anything to disturb him, his mind grew greatly calmer, and consequently his recovery was proportionably rapid.

Freedom from excitement—absolute rest, both of mind and body—was what he required; and this he had to perfection.

It was on the fourth evening that, feeling almost well, he was sitting up, when the sound of voices engaged in conversation came upon his ears.

Having nothing else to occupy his thoughts, and believing that nothing could take place in or about the gipsy encampment that was not of interest to him, he listened.

He soon found out that he was able to distinguish the words uttered tolerably well; and as they continued to be borne to his ears, his interest wonderfully increased.

"Think again," said a voice—"think again, before you reply either way to what I have proposed."

Dick started at the sound, for he was confident that he knew the speaker.

For a short time, however, his identity baffled him.

"I have thought," was the response.

About the identity of this person, however, Dick had no doubts.

It was the man who held what may be called a kind of chieftainship over this portion of the Zingari tribe.

"Well, wait a moment, and I will go over the ground again. Listen!"

"I—"

"Listen, I say!"

The gipsy was silent.

His companion then, in a voice of suppressed excitement, spoke as follows:

"There is no risk to you in the affair, none whatever, and scarcely any difficulty. All that I want is some one of your number—I don't care who—to personate the heir to some property; and I want some others to say that he entered your ranks when about twenty years of age—that he had then every appearance of a gentleman, and only joined you in consequence of some great disappointment in life and reverse of fortune. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, perfectly; but—"

"Stay! Reserve your objections for the present. This young man being found, he will have to come forward and keep to a tale which I shall take care to have him informed of. I will see to lawyers and all that part of the business, and can so arrange it that with moderate care he will have no difficulty in proving himself to be the missing heir of the property. I will take care to furnish him with the papers."

"But—"

"Nay, I have not finished. For this you shall receive any reward you may think fit to demand—such an amount as will enable you and the rest of your tribe to live in independence during the remainder of your existence, instead of continuing your present precarious livelihood."

The man paused, as though he wished the offer he

had just made to sink deeply into the mind of his bearer.

It was at this moment that Dick discovered who this person was.

It was the villain whose schemes for Milly's misery Dick had so signally defeated—in a word, no other than Lord Crake.

To find him in a gipsy's tent surprised Dick in no slight degree.

But he did not stop then to indulge in any reflections or speculations.

He concentrated all his faculties to listen, for now that he had found out who the tempter was, he felt a doable interest in every syllable.

"And what else?" asked the gipsy.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" was the reply, echoed in no little astonishment. "How nothing? Supposing the scheme to succeed, what will become of this young man then?"

"I will tell you that, though I had not at first thought of doing so. He will come into possession of all the property, and then he will sell it to me."

"Sell it to you?"

"Yes. That is, a document will be drawn up by which he will sell it me for half its value, and this will be the reward I mentioned."

"I don't see it," said the gipsy. "I can't see my way clear at all."

"Not see your way clear?"

"No, I cannot. You are telling me half a story. Take me altogether into your confidence. Tell me all from first to last."

"And supposing after I have done so, and you thought fit to decline, what guarantee should I have that you would not come forward and defeat me by laying bare my scheme?"

"I can give you no other guarantee than a gipsy's word. If that is not sufficient, leave me, and there will be an end of the matter."

A silence followed, during which Dick supposed Lord Crake was busily debating within himself.

The gipsy was the first to speak.

"I have only this addition to make," he said, "and that is, if you tell me all and show me that it is safe to make the trial, I will join with you. The house-dwellers never pity the gipsy, and why should I pity them?"

"Very true," said Lord Crake, with an amount of triumphant satisfaction that he could not conceal. "There is no reason why you should show them any extra consideration. Give me your hand upon it."

"You will tell me all?"

"I will, and satisfy you that success is certain."

"I must know all," repeated the gipsy, persistently.

"I will begin at the beginning and end with the end," was the rejoinder; "though I promise you the story is a long one."

"I have nothing else better to do than to listen to it."

"And is there anyone to overhear us?" asked Lord Crake, suspiciously.

"No one."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Well, then, I will commence. Listen!"

We fancy this last injunction was a superfluous one to the gipsy, and quite certain that it was entirely so to Dick, who felt that he would not miss hearing any portion of the narrative that was about to be given for worlds.

In a low, monotonous, but perfectly distinct voice, Lord Crake then said:

"To convince you that I am about to take you wholly into my confidence, I shall not even alter or suppress a single name."

"It is better so," said the gipsy, quietly. "Half confidences are always dangerous."

"The name, then, of the Marquis of Belgarde must be quite familiar to you."

Upon hearing this, Dick started and almost betrayed himself by giving utterance to an ejaculation.

What name could be better known to Dick?

In an instant he brought before him his true old comrade Tom King.

But he could not stay to think, for the gipsy having given an assent, Lord Crake continued:

"You may be aware, too, that it came out that in his

youth this marquis had married much beneath his station."

"He did. He married——"

The gipsy checked himself.

"Who— who?"

"One of our tribe—I shall say no more."

He pronounced his determination so firmly that Lord Crake did not repeat his query.

"Well, growing tired of her, the marquis left her, and some years after married again. The first wedding was such a private one and the secret so well kept that not more than three knew of it. This first wife, a silly fool, possessed with all manner of foolish notions about devotion and generosity to the man she loved, would not make known the marriage nor take any steps to obtain a restitution of her rights. Only on her deathbed did she reveal her rank."

"She had a son, had she not?"

"Yes, a wild reprobate; but yet, with the perversity of womankind, she loved him proportionately to his ill-treatment of her. She told him what and who he was."

"What followed?"

"After her death he at once resolved to regain his own."

"He was successful?"

"He was; and the young heir that was—his half-brother—suddenly found himself deprived of the snug fortune which up to then he had thought his own."

"What became of him?"

"He fled, nor could he ever afterwards be found. He was traced to London, and there all trace of him was lost."

"And do you want some one to personate this missing man?"

"I do."

Here was another surprise for Dick, for that Tom King was the individual referred to was beyond all possibility of doubt.

His listening powers were still in demand.

"A few words will let you into the secret of the rest. This new-found heir, who had passed all his life among the crime and low life of London, had no other way of showing his appreciation of the good fortune that had befallen him than by drinking all the best and most expensive drinks his money could procure. The quantity he swallowed is incredible, and the end such as anyone might have foretold. The young girl he married, and who only accepted him because of his wealth and title, soon died broken-hearted, some said; but others—and most likely they are right—whisper that her death was brought on by her husband's brutality."

CHAPTER MCXVIII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS HIMSELF INVOLVED IN FRESH DANGERS.

LORD CRAKE paused a little, as if for breath, or else in order to nerve himself for what more he had to say, and then continued:

On dying, this coroneted blackguard made a will, the terms of which were as outrageous as his whole life. He bequeathed everything to his illegitimate brother—for so he was, the late earl's second marriage being no marriage at all; and not only that, as there was some doubt as to whether this precious fellow should be found, made a proviso that the whole of the property should go to the daughter of Sir Humphrey Yeomans."

At the mention of this last name the gipsy gave utterance to an angry curse, and lucky was it that he did so, for it drowned the slight exclamation which was forced from Turpin's lips before he was aware of it.

"What's the matter?" asked Lord Crake.

"Never mind—go on!"

"In a minute. Why did you let out that exclamation when I pronounced his name?"

The gipsy was silent.

"It must be that you hate him."

"Perhaps I do. But never mind—go on!"

"Not till you have told me."

"Well then," cried the gipsy, vindictively, "I do hate him—he has always been a bitter, unrelenting foe to all our tribe."

Lord Crake chuckled, for this was a lucky discovery.

"Enough," he said. "Now comes the rest of the tale."

I will sell you without reserve. From particular inquiries which I caused to be made, I came with tolerable certainty to the conclusion that this missing heir would never be found. Accordingly, this girl would reap the benefit, and I determined to make her my wife. I fancied I should succeed. Her parents readily consented to the match. I was received as an accepted lover, and congratulated myself that all was well. But the girl I knew did not like me, though I tried to vanquish her dislike. It was in vain, however, and her father, who was foolish enough to pay regard to her whims, came to me and stated that the match must be broken off. Nothing I could say had the least effect upon his resolution, which was inflexible."

"So you were defeated, then?"

"I was, but I vowed to be successful still, and, what is more, to have my revenge upon the mix."

"How so?"

"Why, by finding some one that I could palm off as the missing heir to the estates. And think how simple the affair will be! You have only to pitch upon some one who can play the part in a suitable manner. You can say that he came to you, took the oath, and was received as a member of your tribe."

"But will that be enough?" asked the gipsy, doubtfully.

"For you it will; and as for the other proofs, you must leave them to me, and take my word that they shall be forthcoming."

"And you hope for success?"

"I am certain of it, provided you perform your part of the contract."

"Do you want my decision now?"

"I do."

"But how if I am unable to find a suitable person?"

"I am not afraid of that, for by your manner I am almost satisfied that you have your eye upon some one already."

"But he may not consent."

"You must explain matters to him, and make him understand how much he will be the gainer."

"To tell you the truth," said the gipsy, "that is the only part of it I don't like."

"How?"

"Why, I think you must have some further design in your head."

Lord Crake laughed.

"If you have any ultimate plot in your head to defraud us after you have made us your tools, beware! Take my advice—do not attempt it, or you will suffer dearly, for it will be a matter in which the whole tribe will join, and you will find it impossible to escape the vengeance of so many. If you have thought of such a thing, for your own sake I implore you to abandon the idea this moment."

"What puts such a ridiculous thing into your head?" asked his lordship, forcing a laugh.

"The terms you propose to us seem to be too good—the prospect is too glittering."

"A fine notion that! But let me tell you your fears are groundless."

"I am glad to hear it."

The gipsy spoke as though he was thoroughly in earnest, and no doubt he was so.

"I mean well by you," said Lord Crake, "and the reason is that the property is quite large enough to bear a division, and yet leave me as much as I require. And now to go back to Sir Humphrey Yeomans and his daughter. After the insult I have received at their hands it is only natural that I should look to be revenged—and will it not be vengeance to deprive her of this?"

"Give me your hand," said the gipsy. "I will go through with you in this business—not so much on account of the money which is to be gained by it, but rather because I should like to wring the baronet's proud heart—no easy thing to do, as I daresay you are aware. But his daughter is his tender point."

"It is—it is!" answered Lord Crake, with the same amount of vindictiveness in his tones as he had displayed on a former occasion.

Then he muttered:

"It will go hard with me if my revenge does not reach further than this!"

"What do you say?"

"Nothing—nothing. Am I to look upon this business as being settled?"

"You may rely upon me. If I fall short, it will be through no fault of mine."

"Do not mention failure. With moderate care we must succeed, so never think of failure."

By the sound which now reached his ears, Dick could tell that his lordship had risen to his feet, and consequently that the conference was over.

He listened, however, in the hope that he might hear yet a few words more.

In this expectation he was defeated.

He caught only the sound of their retreating footsteps.

Satisfied that they had left, Dick Turpin gave himself up to those reflections to which what he had overheard could not fail to give birth.

"How wonderful," he murmured—"how truly wonderful! Who could have believed that I, of all others, should overhear this nice little plot? Sir Humphrey will have no occasion to regret having acted towards me as he did. I could have wished for nothing better than the opportunity of rendering them such a service as now lies within my power."

But even as these words escaped him, he was suddenly reminded of the great extent to which he was indebted to the gipsies.

They had unquestionably saved his life at a moment when he was very near indeed to losing it—when he must have perished but for their assistance.

Then, they had refused to hand him over to the police when the temptation to do so was very strong indeed.

In laying bare the conspiracy of which he had been an auditor, he must, of course, implicate them, or, at the very least, be the means of bringing about their defeat.

This was embarrassing, because, although in the wrong, yet it was ill requiring them for what they had done on his behalf.

Dick's hesitation, however, did not long continue.

His old comrade's memory and Milly's welfare overbalanced all consideration he was inclined to show the gipsies on the grounds we have mentioned.

He must place himself in antagonism with one or the other, and there was everything to induce him to resolve that no effort on his part should be wanting to prevent the consummation of so monstrous a fraud.

"Tom cannot enjoy those possessions himself," he said; "but next to doing so would be the satisfaction that they had fallen into the hands of so worthy an object as the baronet's daughter. As for Lord Crake, if by chance we should ever meet, he will find that there will be an account to settle between us."

This discovery, of course, set Dick's mind in a state of furious tumult again, nor could he for the life of him subdue it.

But he was stronger now, and much better able to withstand the effects of any excitement.

As the gipsy-boy, Sebel, had correctly informed him, his hurt was nothing more than a flesh wound, which, under the care of the old sibyl Cazza, rapidly grew well.

Nature herself recovered him from the effects of the vast quantity of blood he had lost—indeed, Dick thought himself quite well, though he vastly overrated his strength.

"What steps shall I take?" he asked himself. "How shall I act for the best in this matter? How powerless I am! With such a look-out as is doubtless kept against me, it will be the most difficult thing in the world for me to do that which another ordinarily situated would accomplish with all the ease imaginable."

He ceased speaking, but his thoughts continued to be busily enough employed.

But deciding upon a definite line of action in such a matter was of no ordinary difficulty.

"Ah!" he said, struck by a sudden thought which seemed to promise him a ready solution of his difficulty, "let me think—let me tax my memory. Tom named some solicitors or other in York to whom he would have to apply. Who were they? What on earth could have been their names?"

He taxed his memory vainly. The names were lost.

But thinking back upon the events of the past brought to his recollection the circumstance that, as a matter of precaution, Tom had requested him to make a memorandum of these names.



[DICK TURPIN RECEIVES IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE OSTLER.]

He at once began to fumble in his pockets, though with very small hopes of finding what he sought.

But in an inner breast pocket of his coat he found a beautifully-bound gilt-edged pocket-book, which had no doubt belonged to a person of considerable distinction.

Opening this with eager haste, Dick turned over the vellum leaves until he came to one whereon was written, in very straggling, ill-formed letters, the following words:—

"Messrs. Flint and Steel,
Solicitors.
York."

"That is it!" he almost cried aloud, so great was his exultation at this unhopcd-for discovery. "There is no street mentioned, as I could have wished; but I must do my best to find them out. I shall manage it now I know their names."

Again he paused.
No. 243.—BLACK BESS.

"I will go to these men, although I have little reason enough to be fond of lawyers; but I will go to them—it is my duty. And if in the execution of it I should lose my life, what matters it?—what is existence that I should value it so highly?"

But many obstacles stood in the way of achieving such a simple matter as this.

How was he to leave the gipsy encampment.

If he could do so secretly, it would be so much the better.

A moment's thought, however, showed him that this was impossible, so he abandoned the idea at once.

Before he had settled anything, the principal object of his thoughts—that is to say, the gipsy himself—entered the caravan.

How to treat him, Dick was at a loss to decide; and the worst of it was, a very short time was allowed him to make up his mind in.

Should he admit that he had overheard the plot, and endeavour to persuade him to change his determination?

No; that would be useless, because by the custom of the tribe what word is given must be stood to.

"I owe you many thanks," said Turpin, at length, a slight amount of hesitation manifesting itself. "But I fancy I shall be able to reward you, though not as you deserve, nor as I could wish."

"Say no more about that," answered the gipsy. "Do you find yourself much better?"

"Wonderfully better—so much so that I think I shall try to rid you of me to-night."

"Nay, nay—think not of such a thing."

"Yes," said Dick—"it is imperative."

"But you are not strong enough to walk a dozen paces."

"So you think."

"I am certain of it. You would be mad to think of attempting to go a journey to-night."

"But it is imperative," said Dick. "I have business on hand which will not bear even an hour's delay."

"At any rate, stay till to-morrow," said the gipsy, earnestly. "I should be sorry for you to fall into the hands of your enemies after having baffled them so far. And let me tell you they have by no means given over the pursuit. They seem certain you are hidden somewhere, and believe they have only to wait long enough and you will show yourself."

"Is it so?" said Dick.

"I assure you of it."

"To-morrow night, then, is the utmost limit to which I can prolong my stay. I may as well fall into the hands of my foes as fall in that which wholly depends upon me."

"You are welcome," said the gipsy. "But you know best. You are free to do as you list; and, what is more, be sure the tribe will always aid you to whatever extent lies in their power."

"Many thanks!" said Dick, who at this moment was very near acknowledging that he had overheard Lord Crake's conspiracy.

But he took a second thought, and remained silent.

What more passed had no special interest.

The night elapsed without the least alarm, though Dick's impatience made each hour seem three.

The day seemed to pass even more tediously; but Dick had made up his mind just what to do, and towards noon he fell sound asleep.

His intention may be expressed very briefly.

It was to make his way to York, ascertain the residence of the solicitors, and disclose to them all that he had by chance become acquainted with.

How simple this appeared, and yet what tremendous danger Dick would incur by attempting to carry it into effect!

Had it been ten times as great, however, it would not have prevented Turpin from executing his resolve.

It was dusk when he awoke.

He started up suddenly, for he was surprised to find so many hours had passed away.

The first object upon which his eyes rested was the form of the gipsy chief.

It was quite possible that the slight sound made by him in entering the caravan had abruptly terminated the slumber of the fugitive.

"So late!" were Dick's first words.

"Time enough," was the laconic answer. "It is not dark enough for you to leave our tents; and, remember, if you were seen departing we should have to pay very dearly for having sheltered you."

"I know that, and for my own sake shall be careful not to compromise you—I owe you too deep a debt of gratitude."

The gipsy made no reply to this speech save by nodding his head.

Then he showed Dick a cup which he held carefully in one hand.

"Cazza has sent you this," he said. "It is a cordial of rare efficacy and virtue. It will give fresh strength to your flagging limbs. The effects will not be permanent, of course," he added, "but you will experience great benefit from the draught."

Dick took the draught which was offered him.

It was three-parts full of some dark-coloured decoction.

As he received it a momentary doubt crossed his mind.

Did it mean treachery?

Would the effects of the potion be precisely opposite to those declared?

Was it a plan to deliver him to his foes?

His suspicions lasted but a second.

He was instantly struck with the reflection that if it was the intention of the gipsies to betray him, they had had abundant opportunities for doing so, and no reason to show why they should have aided him thus far.

With a feeling in his heart that he had done his benefactors a deep wrong by allowing such a thought to enter his breast, he placed the cup to his lips and drained it of its contents without either hesitation or dread of the result.

Almost as soon as he had swallowed the last drop he became sensible of its invigorating properties.

His heart beat with stronger and more regular pulsations, forcing the blood through every vein, while an oppressive load seemed suddenly lifted off his mind.

"You feel the effects?" said the gipsy, interrogatively.

"I do indeed."

"Before you start, eat heartily. Who can say how long it will be before you have the opportunity of making another meal?"

"True," said Turpin—"very true. But I must leave at dark."

"That will not be for half an hour to come, at the very least; so make yourself easy until then."

The gipsy's considerate advice was carefully acted upon.

Dick had a very large amount about his person, consisting of money and valuables of various kinds.

From this store he amply satisfied the tribe, who had little anticipated such liberality.

"And now," said the gipsy chief, "if you want a horse there is a good one at your service. You will find it easy travelling; I don't think you have strength enough to walk far."

"I feel the strength of a hundred men."

"That is from the draught; but I warn you the effect will not last. Let me advise you to take the horse."

But Dick very firmly and decidedly shook his head.

"You have my thanks just the same," he said, "but I have made up my mind to go on foot. In this case I shall not run so much risk of observation; moreover, I am not going far."

"You know your own business best; but still, I should recommend you not to decline my offer."

"I will tell you my great reason for doing so," said Dick, with a peculiar smile. "But when Black Bess staggered and fell dead beneath me, I made up my mind as I had prevented her from having another master, so would I refuse to cross the back of another steed. And when I even contemplate doing so, may I be immediately visited by some great misfortune!"

The gipsy saw nothing strange or unaccountable in this—on the contrary, the feeling was one which he could perfectly comprehend.

"The fear is a vague one," added Dick, "but yet I might find some other animal that would supplant my poor mare in my affections. I have had no other steed, and I will have no other."

By the time he had expressed this determination, the time for departure had arrived.

Darkness completely shrouded all things, and under the cover of it Dick hoped to be able to elude the utmost vigilance of his foes.

On quitting the encampment, Dick did not make his way towards York, though he had been careful to inquire in what direction the city lay.

As soon as he felt certain, however, that he was out of sight of the encampment, he changed his course, and walked as nearly as he could judge in a straight line to his destination.

The vigour imparted by the strengthening draught deceived him, and produced disastrous results.

Overrating his powers, he was not content with making his way at a moderate speed, but hurried on at a pace

much too fast to be called a walk and yet by no means a run.

It proved, however, to be a most exhaustive one; and before he had proceeded three-quarters of a mile on his journey he was obliged to come to a halt.

He was dead-beat; and that new-found strength in which he had so much rejoiced left him weaker than before.

He struggled on for some distance further; but every yard cost him a tremendous effort, for he was reduced to such a deplorable state of weakness that a child's strength would have been almost enough to overcome him.

The knowledge of his condition filled him with the greatest apprehensions lest his pursuers should chance to obtain a clue to his whereabouts.

To make his position still worse, the moon rose; and though she was some days past the full, yet, as the heavens were almost free from clouds, she cast around her a much greater amount of light than Turpin wished to have.

"I must rest," he said—"I must rest. Perhaps if I remain perfectly still for a little while my spent strength will in some degree return to me. It was thoughtless of me—most thoughtless to act as I have. I ought to have husbanded my strength with the utmost care."

But this after-wisdom had now no practical good.

He flung himself down, however, upon the smooth turf in a meadow, having taken care to choose a spot that was cast into deep shadow by a belt of trees.

Here he remained he knew not how long, for he did not trouble himself to take notice of the flight of time.

As soon as he felt somewhat recovered he arose.

The moon was shining, as it seemed to him, with additional brilliancy; but perhaps this was caused by his suddenly coming out of the shadow of the trees.

Slowly and gently, he recommenced his journey, carefully avoiding all roads or frequented paths.

Slight as the exertion was, ere long it told greatly upon him.

In a little time he was compelled to rest, and as he wearily dragged himself onwards these rests became more and more frequent.

"I shall never reach York before daylight," he murmured, at last, in a weak voice. "I find it will be impossible. What shall I do? Where shall I look for a place where I can remain without much fear of being found by the police officers?"

He looked all around him, as though in the hope that his eyes would light upon the place he needed.

It was in vain.

He was evidently upon some farmer's land, for everywhere around the land was carefully cultivated, and here and there could be seen some implement of husbandry.

"There must be a homestead not far off," Dick said at length. "Shall I venture to make my way there? I fancy I have no better chance. Farmers have the general reputation of being good-natured and generous, and so I have found them, I think, without exception. Who knows—I may be fortunate enough to find a friend."

This was very far indeed from being likely, yet Dick felt it no slight consolation to keep the prospect of such a thing before his mind.

Just then he came to a kind of beaten track, which, by its character, seemed as though it led towards the farmhouse.

He walked along it, not so much, perhaps, with the view of making his way to the door of the habitation and asking shelter as with the idea that he might reach some shed or other outbuilding where he could repose his wearied limbs.

The ground had an upward tendency for some distance; but when the level was gained Dick saw before him at no great distance a confused mass of thatched roofs, no doubt covering the homestead.

Very beautiful and very peaceful did the scene look in the silvery moonlight—so calm, so suggestive of happiness, contentment, freedom from care or danger, that as the fugitive gazed upon it his feelings mastered him.

A choking sob rose in his throat, and for a moment or two the quiet scene was hidden from him by a mist of heart-wet tears.

CHAPTER MXXIX.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED ON HIS ARRIVAL AT THE FARM.

THE prospect before Dick Turpin, so full of peacefulness as it was, made the misery of his own existence all the more palpable from the contrast.

It was no wonder that, especially in his present enfeebled state, he should be overcome by his feelings.

As soon as he recovered himself a little, he stretched out his arms yearningly towards the humble abode, and, in a broken voice, exclaimed:

"What perfect happiness, what freedom from all worldly care, must be the fortunate lot of those who dwell yonder! Life to them must be a calm and pleasant river, down which they float with a gentle, ebbing tide. Now life to me has in it no touch of enjoyment or of peace—hunted from place to place like a wild beast, allowed no rest, deprived of the opportunity of doing good when it lies in my power. All is war—nothing but war, which, even in my case, is productive of the utmost misery. Oh! if I could only once more gain that sequestered spot where one-half of my heart lies buried beneath the churchyard sod, I should be happy—I should be content, unenvying the most brilliant destiny which mortal ever enjoyed upon this earth! Oh! if I could only reach it—if I could only reach it!"

The last words were pronounced with a fervent earnestness which cannot be expressed—nothing could be more ineffable.

This mention of the little village on the French seacoast, however, so far from increasing his dejection, had a precisely opposite effect.

His breast immediately became filled with the hope of reaching this place in a little time; and the next words which passed his lips consisted of a strong determination to brace up every nerve, to redouble all his efforts, to satisfy this anxious longing.

"I will do it," he exclaimed—"yes, even if the number of my foes was doubled—even if ten times as many obstacles lay before me in my path! I will render, first of all, this great service to the fair girl who, out of the gentleness of her sweet nature, afforded me protection when I so badly needed it, and then, despite the endeavours of all the police officers in the kingdom, I will fight my way to the sea-shore, embark, and remain at rest."

He was silent for a few moments.

Then, with a firmer and steadier footfall than he had yet employed, he made his way towards the homestead.

But the new-found vigour imparted by excitement vanished soon, and again and again he was compelled to rest.

At last, after a tedious lapse of time, he reached one of the outlying sheds—a place used for a variety of purposes, but now it chanced to be almost filled with straw.

Upon this Dick flung himself with an over-weary sigh, and almost instantly consciousness abandoned him.

He fancied that certainly not more than a moment elapsed before he was startled by the rough tones of some strange voice.

Opening his eyes quickly, he saw that there was a dull gray light visible.

"Can it be dawn?" he asked himself, mentally.

The strange voice reached his ears again.

"I won't have these horses here—don't I tell you so! Take them off at once!"

"Yee, meester—I'll be with you momentarily."

What a sigh of relief it was that Dick gave utterance to when these words fell upon his sense of hearing!

The danger that he so much feared was not present.

His natural thought on awaking was that his enemies were close by.

When he found that this was not the case he moved.

Although the movement was slight, it caused him an infinity of pain, for all his joints seemed stiffened as if with gout.

He was, too, very—very cold.

But he moved again, though the agony it caused almost wrung a groan from his lips.

Nothing save motion, however, would restore the

arrested circulation of his blood, and the sooner this was over the better.

Still it required him to call up all the fortitude he was master of.

At length he emerged from the straw-filled shed, and, standing upright by dint of clinging to the woodwork, he looked about him.

The first objects upon which his eyes fell were those of a tall, burly-looking man and a couple of horses.

Doubtless these were the animals to which he had alluded, for they were munching at a quantity of hay.

"The occupier of this place, no doubt," thought Dick. "Surely, with all this prosperity around him, he will be filled with compassion as soon as he beholds such a miserable wretch as I am now! I will drag myself towards him—I will ask for shelter and protection."

Dick moved but languidly and with difficulty, but the farmer saw him not, his whole attention apparently being absorbed by a man who was at work at a little distance.

But, suddenly turning round, he caught sight of Dick within a few paces of him.

The start he gave upon making this discovery had something ludicrous in it.

Dick leaned himself against the side of the building where the horses stood.

He was so giddy and faint that without this support he must have fallen to the ground.

The farmer, recovering from his first shock of surprise, bent upon him a gaze that held out very little prospect of a friendly reception.

He did not speak, but scanned Dick from head to foot.

The appearance of the fugitive was by no means commendatory, for the vicissitudes Dick had recently experienced had by no means improved his looks.

"Have mercy!" said the fugitive, feebly—"have mercy and pity, for, as you see, I am in want of both!"

"I don't know you!" growled the farmer. "Who are you?—what do you want?"

"Nothing more than a few hours' shelter," answered Dick, replying only to the last query, for he saw it would be useless to make an appeal for much hospitality.

"Take it, then," was the reply, spoken with a harsh voice. "I don't encourage vagrants as a rule, but as you look ill, and seem as though you had known better days, I don't mind letting you lie down on the straw yonder for an hour or two. But when you are rested you must troop off—I'll have no such varmint as you about the farm. Mind that!"

And with this he turned on his heel and walked with a swift step towards the man whose movements he had been watching.

Dick heaved another sigh.

"And is this churl the fortunate inhabitant of this respectable place? How unworthy of it! All its charms are unappreciated by him. How strange such beings should be so fortunate! Lie down in the straw! Well, well—perhaps that is more consideration than many would have shown me."

Dick had to pause a minute or two, leaning against the boarding of the shed, before he could recover himself sufficiently to crawl back into the place he had just left.

But his heart was heavy with disappointment.

He had filled himself up with the idea that the inmates of the farm-house would willingly have done all they could to alleviate his distress.

Of all the disappointments he could remember having experienced, not one seemed half so bitter as this.

With more dejection than he had yet displayed, he cast himself down again upon the straw.

It was not long, though, before inherent pride came to his aid, and enabled him to shake off the depression of spirits under which he laboured.

He then found it some relief to pour out his resentment against the churlish farmer, although there was no one near to interrupt him.

He was interrupted by hearing some one coming.

This circumstance, of course, took his attention instantly.

But whatever uneasiness he may have experienced was dispelled when he saw that it was a shock-headed

urchin—one of the oddest-looking creatures it had ever been his lot to behold.

His age might have been guessed at fourteen—it may have been more, but was probably less.

He was attired in a kind of white smock frock, which left no part of his person visible from his neck to his ankles.

As he approached, he was amusing himself by whistling some extraordinary melody.

It would seem as though he had been sent on some errand to the very shed under the roof of which Dick lay.

The boy little expected to see a stranger there. His distended cheeks collapsed, and the whistling ceased as if by magic.

But he recovered himself almost instantly, and with an odd mixture of audacity and awkwardness, he came nearer to Dick in order to indulge his curiosity by a closer view.

Upon coming as near as he probably thought was consistent with prudence he stopped, and indulged himself with a good stare.

"Who be ye?" he asked, at length.

Dick, who had been looking closely at the new-comer, saw that beneath his rough exterior there was a certain amount of sharpness and intelligence, though most would have called it cunning.

He fancied, also, that he could perceive something like an air of friendliness about him.

But this might have been fancy, for never before had Dick felt such a strong, irresistible craving for companionship.

"Who be ye?" said the boy, again, after waiting what he thought, perhaps, sufficient length of time for Dick to answer. "Has t' old farmer seed ye? I reckon not, fur he allows none of your sort here."

"I have seen him," said Dick; "and he has told me that I may rest here for a short time."

"My eye, what a wonder! But who be ye?" he reiterated, with more anxiousness than before.

"A stranger."

"I could a to'd thee that, mun!" he exclaimed, with a grin at his own sharpness. "But I think as how I knows you, though you be natively altered."

"Know me?" ejaculated Dick, with a sudden movement.

"Yes," said the boy, nodding—"I think I've seed you afore."

"Nonsense—nonsense! I am a stranger here."

"That may be; but I seed ye at York."

Dick bent forward curiously.

"I'm right—I'm sure I'm right!" continued the boy. "I know where I seed you—I wor at the Bowling-Green at York. You was a-playing at ninepins, and after you had gone the folks all said as how you were Dick Tarpin, and as how you had rode a 'oss—leastways, your mare, Black Bess—from London to York in one night!"

The boy evidently recognised Dick.

He spoke these words, too, in a tone of voice that sounded most dangerously loud in the ears of the weary fugitive.

He evidently failed to understand the vital necessity which existed for the use of secrecy and caution.

Dick held up his hand.

"Hush—hush!" he cried. "Come closer. You speak too loud."

But the shock-headed youth seemed to doubt the advisability of drawing any closer.

"Fear nothing," said Dick. "I only want to speak to you."

"But tell me who you are?"

"Come closer, then. I will not hurt you, and I will tell you all."

This assurance and the promise combined dispelled his dread, and, without further hesitation, he placed himself within arm's-length.

"If you will be my friend," said Dick, earnestly, "this will be the best day you have ever had. Look here—I have money in abundance. You shall have as much as you require, provided you are faithful and secret."

Dick was not deceived when he fancied he could detect the existence of a certain brightness of intellect in this lad.

He clearly comprehended all that Dick said to him, and,

what was stranger still, the rudeness and uncouthness he had showed at first wore off to a remarkable extent.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"But will you promise to serve me?"

"Are you Dick Turpin?"

The fugitive hesitated a moment before he replied, but feeling that it would be worse than useless to give a denial, he said:

"I am."

No sooner had he uttered these words than, to his greater surprise, the boy manifested the utmost signs of joy and satisfaction.

"I thought it was, blest if I didn't!"

"Will you serve me?"

"Yes—that is—"

"What are your conditions?" interrupted Dick, quickly.

"That you tell me all about your ride to York on Black Bess—I mean every one of the particulars."

The boy's eyes glittered with excitement.

"I promise that readily," answered Dick, as soon as he had recovered himself from the surprise into which this strange request had thrown him.

"That's all right, then. Hurrah!"

"And is that all?"

"No, not all. I want something else."

"I thought so. What is it?"

"Why, money enough to buy a horse," he continued, with growing excitement.

"A horse?"

"Yes—and a suit of first-class clothes as well, a brace or two of pistols, and plenty of powder and lead."

Dick's amazement increased.

"You are an odd customer, and no mistake!" said Dick.

"What on earth do you want a horse and these things for?"

"Because," was the reply, spoken with more excitement than ever in tone and gesture—"because then I should set up as highwayman myself, and perhaps ride all the way from York to London."

Dick was so surprised at this announcement that for a moment or two he was deprived of speech.

His first inclination was to break out into a hearty laugh.

Prudence, however, whispered that the best thing he could do would be to subdue this impulse; for if indulged in, it might change this boy into a foe.

Dick could not afford to lose one who, no matter with what motives, was ready and willing to be his friend.

A more unlikely figure for a highwayman was certainly never before beheld.

"You don't know what you are asking for," said Dick, at length. "If you have any serious intention of adopting such a course, take my advice and abandon it."

"Not till I've given it a good trial," was the firm rejoinder. "I have thought a good deal about it, I have, and the first time I have a chance I mean to try it on."

This determination was delivered in that particular way which makes you feel that any dissuasive arguments would be worse than useless.

"You will not betray me?" cried Dick, presently, fixing a keen glance upon him.

The boy made a gesture of impatience and disdain.

"Does the gaffer know you?"

"Who's the gaffer?"

"Why, the farmer yonder."

"He does not."

"I thought he didn't, because why: if he did, he would send for the officers pretty quick—and do you know they are close by here now!"

"Close by?" ejaculated Dick, with a start.

"Yes. I seed 'em when I fetched the cows up by old Mobbe's coppice."

Dick was as wise as ever.

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know; but I will go and see, if you like."

"Do so—do so; and yet, stay," added Dick, who could hardly feel certain that the boy would not be tempted to betray him.

"What is it, captain?"

"Do you know what a large reward there is offered to anyone who will discover me?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is very large."

"I don't care if it is. Lor' bless you, captain, I ain't such a fool as I look—oh no, not by a good many long chalks. I know them Lunnnon officers before to-day."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Suppose as how I was to tell them where you are, and be green enough to think I should get the money, what do you think would be the upshot? Why, they would stick to all the blessed lot themselves, and tell me if I said a word they'd swear a robbery on to me, and tell me I ought to feel glad to get off. Oh, I know 'em, I does."

"So it appears," answered Dick, who from that moment gave the boy credit for more than an ordinary share of intelligence.

"Is that all you've got to say, captain?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go off and see if the officers are about. Don't you move till I come back."

He hurriedly departed, leaving Dick in anything but a comfortable frame of mind.

In spite of everything, the fugitive felt wretched and full of doubt.

Should the officers be at hand, what should he do—how could he hope to escape them?

The farmer if questioned would readily give every information, and it seemed as though he could not possibly avoid falling into their hands.

How rejoiced he felt when he heard the sound of the boy's returning footsteps!

"I can't see anything of them now," he said, in reply to Dick's anxious inquiring glance, "but I have heard as how they have been searching round for you, and so it's most likely they will come here before they leave off."

"I must depart," said Dick, rising with great difficulty.

"I must depart. I dare not remain here any longer."

"And if you go," said the boy, "what is to save you then?"

"What is to save me if I remain?"

"I will."

"T harks for your good will, but I fear it would be beyond your powers to accomplish it."

"You don't know what I could do."

"I certainly do not."

"I should hide you."

"And what good would that be?"

"The officers would never find you."

Dick shook his head.

"The farmer would tell them I was somewhere about the premises, and they would not leave until they had searched every corner."

"Very true," said the boy, scratching his head; "I did not think of that."

Dick came towards the front of the shed, as if about to emerge.

But his strange companion pushed him back.

"Wait a bit, captain; we must think this matter over. Ah! you may smile, but I have heard the fable about the mouse that set the lion free, and I daresay you have too."

"I certainly have," answered Dick, more and more astonished at the boy's manner.

"Very well, then. Now you will hardly think it, but I have thought of a plan to make your safety quite certain."

"You have?"

"I really have, captain."

"Let me hear it, and rest assured I shall not suffer you to be a loser by what you do for me."

"I want nothing more than I have asked you for."

"Well, well—we shall see about that. I am impatient to hear your plan."

"It's simple enough."

"So much the better."

"All you have to do is to go up to the gaffer yonder, and say how very thankful you are for his hospitality, and tell him you are going because you have particular business which won't let you stay any longer."

"Well?"

"That's just to throw him off the scent, you know. Well, when you have said that, you must walk away towards the granary yonder. Do you see it?"

"That round place covered with red tiles?"

"Yes, that's it. You will, as I said, walk towards that, as if you were going straight away as fast as you could."

"I quite understand."

"Well, then, you see the path goes straight to the granary, and then turns round it. Now, as soon as ever you turn the corner of the building so as to be out of sight of the gaffer—for he is almost sure to stand and watch you—you must stand still with your back close to the wall and wait till I come to you."

"And what else?" said Dick.

"That's enough for the present. Do as I tell you. If he's coming, and if he sees me speaking to you it will be all up."

So saying, the boy hastily retreated, leaving Dick in anything but a settled state of mind.

A moment's consideration made him decide that it would be best to follow the boy's instructions.

Indeed, any movement would be better than remaining where he was.

Accordingly, he emerged from the shed and walked limpingly towards the farmer, who, seeing him approach, waved him off with an impatient and angry gesture.

But Dick, who had grown wonderfully stronger, continued to advance towards him.

Pausing when a few yards from him, he took off his hat and made a bow with much of that grace for which he had once been famous.

"I am grateful," he said, in tones that were full of the deepest irony—"very grateful to you for your kind hospitality; I am rested now, and as I have business which will admit of no delay, I am anxious to depart. Good morning!"

Again he bowed, and then immediately turned on his heel.

The words must have touched him, for he called out:

"Hi—hi—stop! Don't go yet! Come in the house and have something to eat and drink."

But Dick firmly shook his head, and continued to walk as fast as his stiffened limbs would let him towards the granary.

"D—n him for a fool!" cried the farmer, angrily. "However, he can't say anything against me now. I asked him and he refused, so that is his look-out."

The farmer seemed to derive abundant satisfaction from this circumstance, and, as the boy had foretold, continued to watch Dick's receding figure until it vanished round the angle of the granary.

Beyond this point it was no longer possible to observe the path without he had quitted his position, so that he never for one moment suspected that Dick had stopped.

With another hearty curse upon beggars and their pride, he turned on his heel and marched off to superintend the agricultural operations that were being carried on.

In the meanwhile, Dick, according to the instructions he had received, stopped close against the wall.

From this point he was able to obtain a tolerably extensive view, and his first proceeding was to scan the landscape with a rapid glance.

"All is well in that quarter," he said; "there are no officers to be seen there."

He unconsciously spoke these words in a much louder tone than was prudent—at any rate, the boy overheard them.

"Not there, captain," he said, "but they're a coming across by Banks's Meer, and will be at the farm in no time."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite. But don't put yourself about, captain—there isn't the least occasion. If they come from Lunnon, and think themselves mighty clever, they will find the north country chaps a match for them."

CHAPTER MCXX.

MR. SKELLUM MAKES A SEARCH IN THE GRANARY.

THERE was such a degree of confidence and assurance in the boy's manner that Dick Turpin really began in earnest to believe that his pursuers were destined to have one more defeat added to the long list of those which they had already experienced.

"This way, captain—follow me, and you will soon see what sort of a hiding-place I intend for you. Be quick, or the officers may catch a glimpse of you."

The boy held open the door of the granary, and Dick readily enough crossed the threshold, because it seemed pretty clear that if he attempted to move away from the shadow of the building he would inevitably be seen.

The interior of the granary seemed at first to be profoundly dark, but Dick's eyes growing accustomed to the gloom enabled him to perceive that his new friend was very busy with something which, on closer inspection proved to be a ladder.

This he placed against the wall in one corner, and going to a little shelf just over the door by which he had entered, produced a key.

With this in his hand he hastily ascended the ladder and thrust it into the lock of a trap-door.

"Now, captain," he said, "this door is a devil of a weight, because it is iron, you see, and I want you to help me to lift it up."

Dick also mounted the ladder, and willingly rendered the assistance required.

By their united aid the trap-door was easily raised, and when it had reached a certain height the boy propped it up with an iron rod provided for the purpose, which prevented it from falling.

"Now, captain," he said, "follow me, and the sooner the better—there is not a second to lose."

"Is this where you are going to conceal me?" asked Dick, glancing around him.

"This is the place, captain."

This upper portion of the granary was much better lighted than the lower, though here so much gloom reigned that it was not very easy to distinguish one object from another.

All that the place appeared to contain, however, was a large quantity of either wheat or oats—not contained in sacks, but spread upon the floor, which was composed of iron, and so contrived that it could be heated from below when necessary, so as to dry the grain which laid upon it.

The depth was considerable—certainly more than a yard.

"Now, look here, captain," said the boy: "you must go over to that corner yonder, and help me to make a hole in the corn—you must lay down in it, and I will cover you all over with it so that no one would be able to guess you are here. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

And by way of showing that he thought well of the plan, Dick hastened to the corner indicated, and set to work to scoop up the corn.

A sufficiently large hole was made in a very little time indeed, and then, by the boy's directions, Dick laid down.

"Cover your face with your cap, captain—that's it! Now you will be comfortable. I will throw the corn on very light, and you will be able to breathe without any trouble."

With this wise suggestion Dick at once complied.

With great speed his new friend set about completing his task, which he did with great skill; and no one to have looked at the surface of the corn on the granary floor would guess that it had been disturbed, let alone anyone hid under it.

"Now, captain," were his parting words, "don't on any account think of moving until I come back again, which you may depend I shall be sure to do as soon as ever it is safe for me to do so."

"All right!" said Dick, though his voice sounded so muffled and hollow that it fairly made the boy jump—"all right! Can you close the trap?"

"Oh, yes! And now don't say a word!"

Dick was silent, and awaited the result with no small amount of anxiety.

The boy with great agility got down on to the ladder, lowered the trap-door—which was a much easier thing to do than to raise it—and having carefully locked it, placed the key in its accustomed place on the shelf over the door.

Listening for a moment, and finding all silent, he slipped out unobserved and hastened to his work.

There was a bright, twinkling glitter in his eyes as he shuffled along, whistling a popular air the while with a gusto that sufficiently indicated the extent of his satisfaction.

Dick lay and listened, but in vain.

Not the least sound was borne to his ears, which was no doubt in part owing to his being over in the manner we have described.

What seemed to him to be an endless length of time gradually passed away without anything arising that would lead to the belief that the police officers were within a hundred miles of the place.

Suddenly, however, the murmur of voices arose, which soon swelled into a loud chorus, but Dick could not distinguish any of the words that were uttered.

Then a door creaked open, and immediately afterwards Dick recognised the farmer's voice.

"But don't I tell you he's gone!" he exclaimed, in tones that showed he was in a state of great irritation. "I saw him go myself, with my own eyes; and while you are poking about my barns he is getting comfortably out of the way."

"And I tell you he hasn't gone!" was the reply. "If he had left the premises I must have seen him, or at least, some of my men, but we have not. No doubt he would catch sight of us coming, and make up his mind to hide."

It was Skellum who spoke.

Dick had no difficulty in identifying him.

"Never tell me!" responded the farmer, impatiently. "Where on earth could he hide, I should like to know?"

"I shall be able to answer that question best when I have had a good look round."

"Oh, very well—very well!"

"What place do you call this?"

"The granary."

"The granary, eh!" said Skellum, suspiciously. "It's devilish dark. Let's have a light."

"Be careful," remonstrated the farmer—"a spark would serve to set this place on fire, and then I should be a ruined man."

"Do you presume to obstruct his Majesty's officers in the execution of their duty?" asked Skellum, fiercely.

"No—no. Only I—"

"Very well, then, hold your row! Smithers, hand me a light."

Skellum took a lantern from one of his subordinates, and flashed the light of it well around him.

"There's nobody here, anyway. But what's above?"

"The drying-room."

"We'll just have a look at it, if merely for satisfaction's sake. How do you get up?"

"You may well ask that. A wilful man, though, will have his own way; but I am a Dutchman if you ain't losing precious minutes."

"That does not matter to you, does it?" retorted Skellum. "Do you know I have a good mind to take you into custody on suspicion of your having concealed Dick Turpin somewhere, or assisted him to escape!"

"Oh, pooh—pooh!"

"You may pooh-pooh as much as you like; but I've a d—d good mind to do it, now then! Your conduct is quite enough to justify me."

"Don't be absurd."

"Well, well, think yourself lucky if you get off without hearing anything more of this affair. Now tell me how we are to get up into the drying-room."

Skellum's persistence in this matter might well have seemed strange, for there was now no visible means of communication with the upper floor of the granary, the boy having had the prudence to restore the ladder to the latter place.

But, to tell the truth, Skellum was not more certain of anything in all his life than he was that Dick must be hidden somewhere among the farm buildings.

The farmer had acknowledged to having seen him only about a quarter of an hour ago, and Skellum was absolutely certain that no living creature could have crossed the open fields surrounding the homestead without their knowledge.

Having this conviction, he had resolved not to allow any nook or corner, no matter how unlikely it might appear, to pass unexamined.

In appearance a more unlikely place for Dick to be concealed in was that which Skellum was so resolved to pry into.

He saw the ladder fetched out and placed against the wall, and after that the key taken off the shelf over the entrance door.

"If he is up there," Skellum muttered, as he heard the key grate harshly in the rusty wards, "he must either have an accomplice about the farm—which I don't for a moment believe—or else he has gained an entrance by some other means, which is quite possible."

Having come to this conclusion, he followed the farmer up the ladder, and by their joint exertions the heavy trap-door was raised and fixed open.

The crisis had now arrived.

Dick would either escape entirely or be found at once.

When he heard that the farmer was one of the exploring party his uneasiness was great.

He considered, and with good reason, that his eyes would be much more likely to detect any little misplacement of the grain than the police officers', who had never been in the place before.

"This place seems quiet enough," said Skellum, looking around and failing to discern the least thing that was suspicious, for the boy had taken care to leave the grain perfectly smooth and level. "The only thing that I should like to feel certain of is, whether there is any other way in and out than that."

He pointed to the trap door.

"If I told you there wasn't I don't suppose you would take my word," answered the farmer, testily; "and I don't suppose you will feel satisfied until you have passed all this corn through a sieve to make sure he is not in it."

"I should be inclined to take that trouble if I could discern the least sign of its having been disturbed," answered Skellum, deliberately. "It would serve to hide fifty men."

He drew his sword as he spoke, and thrust it several times into the corn round about where he stood; but as that happened to be nowhere near the spot where Dick lay, it was, of course, without success.

"You are sure there is no other way by which admittance can be gained to this place?"

"I will give you my word of it; and if you really want to capture the fellow set out in pursuit of him. Your own common sense ought to tell you that I should not encourage such a vagabond about the place; if I did I should expect to be robbed for my pains, and serve me right too," he added.

"It would," replied Skellum. "Give me your hand. I meant no harm; only if you had the least idea what this fellow has caused me to go through lately, you would wonder at my being in my seven senses at all."

"Very likely," said the farmer. "I don't bear malice, and only hope you may catch him. It is quite certain that he can't be far away, for when I saw him he seemed to be so weak that he could hardly crawl."

"We are bound to have him," said Skellum, who was inspired with fresh hope by these words. "Come on—come on!"

In rather a tumultuous manner the whole of the party now quitted the drying-room.

The trap-door was lowered, the steps removed, and Dick might be said to have added one more to the long list of his hair-breadth escapes.

With keenly-sensitive ears, he listened to the departure of his foes, and when, at length, he heard them close the granary door behind them such a sensation of deep joyfulness came over him as cannot be expressed.

Soon he was left in absolute silence.

The position he was in was a most irksome one, yet he was afraid to ease himself by making the least movement, lest his enemies should return and detect the disarrangement of the grain.

Forced to be still, he endeavoured to reconcile himself as best he could.

The silence, the stillness he was obliged to maintain, and perhaps, too, the confined space he had to breathe in, added to his excessive weakness and fatigue, insensibly drew him into a slumber, which rendered him for a while happily oblivious of all his troubles.

How long this slumber lasted he had no means of judging; but suddenly he awoke without knowing whether anything had occurred to awaken him or not.

He was in doubt, too, where he was, the intense darkness and stillness making him think that he must be in the gipsy's caravan.

But a slight tapping reached his ears, and then, with a

ash, the remembrance of what had occurred came back to him.

Before he could control himself sufficiently to have entire command over his actions, he started up.

No sooner had he done so than he became fully sensible of the imprudent nature of the step.

It was now taken, and could not be recalled.

With fast-beating heart, he listened.

The tapping came again.

"Captain—captain!" he heard some one cry, in a muffled voice, which seemed at least to be miles and miles away.

Dick clasped his hands over his temples, for his brain was not quite clear yet.

Then the tapping was renewed.

This time it was louder than before.

Immediately after, a voice much nearer and clearer said:

"Captain—captain! Where are you? Come and help me—I can't lift the trap-door by myself."

The last words were more than sufficient to dispel any lingering doubts.

"All right!" he answered. "I hear you now—I am coming."

And now Dick's practised hearing did him good service.

Dark as it was, yet he was able to make his way without hesitation to the trap-door.

"How can I help you?" he asked, groping busily the while with both his hands upon the floor.

"You will find a ring," answered his friend. "Put out all your strength, and between us we shall manage it."

Dick soon found the iron ring the boy had mentioned.

By their united exertions the ponderous trap-door was raised.

"Have they gone?" was Dick's first eager question as he caught sight of the boy.

"Yes—long ago. It's all right. Why didn't you answer me when I called you first? You have kept me here knocking for ten minutes at least."

"I was asleep."

"Asleep? Well, that's what I call a good 'un—blest if it isn't! The idea, now, that you should go off to sleep, and the officers poking and prying after you everywhere!"

"It was more like a swoon than slumber," answered Dick; "but I fancy it must have been the latter, I feel so wonderfully refreshed."

"Glad to hear it, captain—you will require to make use of all your energies."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, it's all right enough now! Gaffer and the officers have got first-rate friends. I thought once they would have had a round or two, but now it's all right."

"How all right?"

"Why, they have searched everywhere, and failed to find the least trace of you; and if the gaffer wasn't so very positive, they would not believe you had been here at all. As it is, they vow and maintain that he must have been mistaken in the length of time that elapsed after you left him."

"Oh, that is it! And how has it ended?"

"Why, being compelled to rest, they have accepted the gaffer's invitation. Their horses are all standing in the stable, and they are sitting in the big kitchen, feasting like so many hungry wolves."

"Some of them are outside, watching, I suppose?"

"No, not one."

"Then I must go, for such a favourable state of things may not continue long."

"Now, captain, just be easy, will you? Look here! I have brought you something good in the shape of eating and drinking. Take it, and sit still a bit."

These words reminded Dick that a meal of any kind would be a most acceptable thing; so, without hesitation, he very gladly accepted the provisions which the boy had so thoughtfully provided for him.

It was most important that he should recover his strength as soon as possible.

"And now, captain, take my word for it, you are quite safe where you are—that is, for the present. I should not recommend you to stay all night."

"I cannot. It is most important I should leave at once."

"So you shall, never fear; but you must not fail to keep your word."

"What do you mean?"

"To relate the particulars of your ride to York."

Dick could not refuse compliance with this favour, and so, without any demur, he began, and related with tolerable minuteness all those incidents which have already been placed before the reader.

Never did narrator have a more attentive listener.

Every word was greedily swallowed by his ears; and when Dick brought his narration to a conclusion, he drew a long breath and said:

"Ah, captain, I wish I had got to have it all over again!"

"I would gratify you if it laid at all within my power, but I have most particular business on hand. Tell me—how far am I from York city?"

"Maybe three-parts of a mile."

"No more?"

"Certainly no more—rather less, if anything."

This was welcome news indeed.

Dick drew from his pocket a quantity of valuables.

"Here, my lad," he said, "take these in return for the service you have done me. If I had ten times as much, you would be equally welcome to it."

"No, no, captain—I want no more than I asked you for, nor I won't have more either, so take it back."

"Wait a moment! I shall not take it back; and if you have any serious thoughts of taking to the road, let me earnestly implore you to abandon the idea."

"I can't do it—it has been my dream day and night for—oh, I can't tell how long."

"No matter," said Dick, with a tinge of bitterness and regret in his tones. "Look at me! You see what I am now—a poor, miserable, hunted wretch, with not half my stock of life left in my body, surrounded by dangers which I can scarcely hope to evade much longer, deprived of every comfort and enjoyment, short of everything—as peace, home, friends—that can make existence pleasant. This it is to be a highwayman."

These words produced an effect, and Dick, perceiving it, hastened to follow up with all the dissuasive arguments he could call up.

His trouble was not thrown away.

"You have conquered, captain," said the boy, at length, though the sigh which accompanied the words testified the amount of disappointment he experienced. "I didn't consider the matter properly."

"You did not. But you see now what to look forward to. I have been famous, celebrated, successful; and yet, what am I now? Do you think, if I could have seen the end, that I should have embraced such a career?"

"And shall you give it up?"

"For ever. My sole object now is to get away from England, and when I succeed, no more will be heard of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

An impressive silence followed these words.

The boy hardly knew how to break it, and besides, he had not altogether recovered himself from this rude awakening from his cherished day-dream.

As for Dick, sad, regretful reminiscences deprived him of speech.

With a sudden effort he aroused himself, and having insisted upon the boy receiving the valuables he had drawn out of his pocket, he said:

"Now show me the way out of this place. Finish up the priceless service you have rendered me to-day by putting me on the nearest road to York."

"I will go with you, captain, if you like."

"Many thanks, but for your own sake you had better not. Should we chance to be seen together, the consequences would be most serious to you."

"Never mind me."

"But I do mind you, and will not allow you to make any further sacrifice. Be quick—lead the way!"

No longer attempting to carry his point, the boy obeyed.

The granary was carefully restored to its usual state, so as to leave nothing as a clue to what had taken place, and in a few minutes afterwards Dick once more found himself standing in the open air.

The night was a very dark one, and this, for Dick, was



[DICK TURPIN SHOTS THE GAME COCK.]

a most fortuitous circumstance, though it made the task of keeping the proper road a more difficult one.

Suddenly a loud burst of unruly laughter was carried to their ears.

"The officers are enjoying themselves above a bit, ain't they, captain?"

"It appears so. They are close at hand, are they not?"

"Yes. Look—you see yonder light?"

"Is that the room they are in?"

"Yes. They are making merry now."

"I shall defeat them," said Dick, with something like a return of that energy which had been his characteristic in times of old. "Something seems now to whisper to my heart and say I shall defeat them."

"Of course you will, captain; I have no doubt of it."

The sound of his companion's voice brought him back to a closer consideration of time present.

No. 249.—BLACK BESS.

"York," he cried—"where lies York?"

"Straight before us. Follow me a little way, and I will show it to you."

Dick willingly complied.

A few steps took them clear of all the farm buildings, and pausing on a little knoll, the boy extended his arm, and said:

"There is York."

Dick looked eagerly in the direction thus pointed out.

A few dim and twinkling lights could just be distinguished in the far distance.

"Many thanks!" he said. "I could find my way unerringly with a less guide than that. Farewell! We shall not meet again; but rest assured that Dick Turpin will always think of you with the deepest gratitude. Follow my advice—let nothing induce you to return to your former project. Once more, farewell!"

CHAPTER MOXXI.

THE LAWYER'S CLERK LEARNS MORE THAN IS GOOD FOR HIM TO KNOW.

DICK TURPIN turned upon his heel and strode away with as much swiftness as his strength would permit.

The boy looked after him for a few moments in surprise.

Then he took a few paces forward, as though he had made up his mind to follow.

But he soon checked himself, for he remembered what Dick had said.

"I will stop here and watch him, though," he muttered. "He didn't say a word agen that, did he?"

And with a dogged air, he fixed himself in one position, and remained without moving long after Dick's dusky form had disappeared.

As for the fugitive himself, he could not banish his friend's image from his mind.

The effect which his fidelity had produced upon him was marked indeed.

Only those who have been cut off from all friendly intercourse with their fellow-creatures can truly estimate Dick's feelings on this occasion.

There was a warm glow about his heart, and more than once he felt inclined to call him to his side.

But the recollection of the important business he had under hand would make him change his determination and increase his speed.

Although dark, the hour was by no means late, and as the City of York was such a short distance off, he had every hope of being able to complete his business with the lawyers without delay.

As he strode along, he strove to concentrate his thoughts upon the matter in hand, so that he should be able to give a clear and connected narrative when the time came.

It so chanced that Dick did not catch sight of a single person until after he had entered the city.

He now regretted that he had not made some inquiries of the boy about the address of the solicitors.

Doubtless he would have given him such directions as would have enabled him to find out their abode without much trouble.

Upon finding himself in the streets of the ancient city, he had no other guide than chance.

He walked on at random.

The quarter in which he found himself seemed by no means to be the most respectable; but Dick did not care for that.

Upon turning a corner, his ears were assailed by some strains of music—if the vigorous scraping of a fiddle can be so called.

Directly afterwards, he discovered that the sounds proceeded from a kind of public-house, in the front window of which a rude oil lamp was burning.

Here Dick paused and took a peep into the interior, which he was easily able to do, for a large red curtain, by which the gazing of intruders could have been prevented, was only partially drawn across the casement.

He beheld a group of rough-looking individuals of both sexes dancing vigorously to the fiddle.

"If I could only get a little brandy," thought Dick—"only a very little, I feel as though it would be putting fresh life into me. Shall I run the risk of entering? I think I will. There could not be a better place than this; everybody's attention seems to be engaged."

He hesitated for another moment, and then, turning suddenly, he crossed the threshold.

He procured the stimulant he needed without any difficulty, and might have left the place unnoticed had he not shown himself to be a stranger by asking to be directed to the solicitors.

"Flint and Steel?" said the woman who had served him, and who now bent upon him a keen, inquiring look. "Is it possible that you are such a stranger here as not to know that?"

"You might guess it," he answered, quietly, "or I should not have troubled you. Good night."

"Nay—stop! Do you know the Minster front?"

"Of course."

"Then you know Flint and Steel's, for the house is just opposite."

Upon learning this, Dick retreated hastily, scarcely pausing to bid the woman good night.

"I must not stay long in York," he muttered. "Fortunately, there is nothing to detain me."

The streets were all very quiet.

Just then, the chiming of a clock somewhere close at hand struck upon his ear.

He listened, and counted the strokes carefully.

"Eight o'clock," he murmured, as the last of the musical sounds died away. "The night is younger than I thought by one hour at least, and if I am not nearer the Minster than I believed myself to be, it is very strange."

Dick was right.

He was indeed very close to York Minster, for upon gaining the next corner he found himself in full view of the grand old edifice, which looked doubly magnificent in the obscurity which hung about it.

With a quicker and firmer step—for the brandy was beginning to exert its influence—Dick walked in the wished-for direction.

A very few moments afterwards, and he was standing before the principal front of the building.

How to find out precisely which was the residence of the solicitors was not so easy as he had fancied, for there was a row of twenty houses before him, any one of which might have been considered opposite.

"Chance must guide me," he said. "It will not do to linger, or to inquire again. I will try the middle house."

He did so.

He pulled a bell-handle vigorously; and after waiting for a considerable time, a woman carrying a candle made her appearance.

"Next door!" she said, harshly, in answer to Dick's question, and then abruptly retired.

"I am fortunate, I suppose," he murmured, as he stood before the next house.

His eyes were tolerably well accustomed to the darkness by this time, and he was just able to make out that there was a large brass plate on this door, though he could not distinguish the letters upon it.

This time his summons for admittance was promptly attended to.

A thin, loose-jointed young man, with tow-coloured hair, opened the door, and, in a disagreeable voice, inquired Dick's business.

"I want to see Mr. Flint."

"Not at home!" was the snappish answer.

"Mr. Steel, then."

"Engaged!"

"I will wait, then," replied Dick, and as he spoke the words he crossed the threshold, thus frustrating the young man in his design of slamming the door in his face.

"But don't you know, fellow, that business hours are over?"

"I am quite aware of it; but I come upon a private and important matter that will brook not a moment's delay."

"What is it?"

"That I decline to tell anyone but Mr. Steel."

"Then you will have to come to-morrow, for he is engaged the whole of to-night."

"I cannot come to-morrow," responded Dick. "I am in no hurry, and will wait here until he is at leisure."

Just at that moment a door a little way along the passage was opened, and an elderly man, who wore a large white wig, made his appearance.

He carried a wax candle in one hand, which he held high up above his head.

Then bowing very profoundly, he said:

"Excuse the darkness of my dwelling, your worship. I heartily wish that I dwelt in a place more fit for you to visit."

"Pooh—stuff! None of that gammon, Steel—you know d—d well I don't like it!"

Dick started when he heard this last voice.

"Sir Humphrey," he ejaculated—"and here! What could be more fortunate?"

It was indeed the worthy baronet who now emerged from the lawyer's apartment.

Dick hastened towards him.

"Sir Humphrey," he cried, in an earnest voice, "you know me. Don't speak now—ask the lawyer to go back into the room with us; I have something of the most vital interest to communicate to you."

The baronet's face became in a moment the very picture of extreme amazement.

"You here?" he exclaimed at length. "Why, what the devil—"

"Hush—hush!" interrupted Dick, for he saw that the singular-looking young man who had opened the door stood gazing in open-mouthed astonishment upon the scene. "Not another word, I beg! Let me entreat you to accede to my request!"

"Who is this?" asked Mr. Steel, who had been not a little startled by the suddenness with which Dick had made his appearance.

"Why, it's—"

"You shall know in another moment," cried Dick, in a much louder voice, thus completely drowning what the baronet said. "But I have called to-night because I have a communication of the utmost importance to make to you."

"Come in, then—come in. Shut the door, Rogers. What the devil are you standing there with it open for?"

These last words were addressed to the loose-jointed young man, and who was one of the articulated clerks.

So absorbed were all his faculties by what was taking place, that he was quite oblivious of the fact that he had omitted to close the front door until thus reminded of it.

By the time he had turned round and done this the little party had entered the room.

Mr. Steel went in last, and he carefully shut the door behind him.

But Rogers, the clerk, was either of an inquiring tone of mind, or else especially interested in what was taking place in the lawyer's sanctum, for he dropped down on his knees on the mat and applied his ear closely to the key-hole.

Leaving him to pick up what he can in this manner, we will make the reader acquainted with what actually took place.

When the door was closed, Mr. Steel looked first at one and then at the other, wondering which would speak first.

He was soon relieved on this head, for Dick was fully conscious that he had not a moment to lose.

Addressing himself to the baronet, he said:

"You, sir, know me, and I fancy will give me a better character than most people. Since, by your kind aid, I succeeded in making my escape, I have had many strange adventures; but the most important is that I chanced to overhear the details of a deep-laid plot, which an unworthy villain has planned against your happiness and your daughter's."

What Dick had said at first was not sufficient to arrest the attention of Sir Humphrey, this mention of his daughter was more than enough for the purpose.

A change instantly came over his face, and in a voice and manner entirely different from what he generally employed, he cried:

"Speak out quickly—do not keep me in suspense."

"Nothing is further from my desire."

Dick then, without one word of preface, related what he had overheard while in the gipsy's caravan.

Before he had spoken many words, Mr. Steel became deeply interested, and, taking out a pocket-book, occupied himself by scribbling down copious notes.

Dick had reflected upon what he had to say, and had beforehand called up everything in his mind, so that he was able to repeat the conversation almost word for word.

The baronet drew a long breath as soon as the narrative was concluded.

Then, recovering himself, he said, with great fervour and heartiness:

"Down the sneaking rascal! Milly was right in reading his character. If I had him here I'd—"

"Hush—hush!" interrupted Mr. Steel, blandly. "No violence, your worship!—no violence!"

"Violence be damned! Am I to learn all this, and not have a word to say for myself about it? No! I could rather be—"

"Pardon me—pray pardon me; but what we have just heard is most important. Important!—why, the word seems a thousand times too weak to express it. This is what I call providential—truly providential. Of course," he added, turning to Dick, "you will come forward at the time appointed, and take your oath that all these parti-

culars are correct? And then there will be about the clearest case of conspiracy that was ever laid before a court of justice. But, what the devil do you keep shaking your head in that fashion for?"

"Because," said Dick, speaking very slowly and solemnly—"because I cannot come forward in the way you mention. I have every desire to do so, but circumstances render it impossible."

The solicitor regarded him with an air of blank amazement.

"Why—why?" he asked.

"Sir Humphrey will tell you."

"Nay—tell him yourself."

"Then, Mr. Steel, I have a still greater secret to confide in you—a still more astounding revelation to make."

"What is it?"

"You have heard, I suppose, of one Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"The highwayman?"

"Yes. What of him?"

"Nothing more than that he now stands in person before you."

It would be perfectly useless to attempt to convey any idea of the effect which this altogether unexpected announcement had upon the lawyer.

To use a mild term, his astonishment would have lasted much longer than it did, had not Sir Humphrey exerted himself to put an end to it.

"Don't be so dumfounded, man! It's all true—every word of it. Never mind about his being a highwayman—that has got nothing to do with the matter in hand. He is a downright good fellow, and I would take his word at any time for a thousand pounds."

On any other occasion Mr. Steel would have been staggered by hearing the baronet speak in this manner, for, of course, he was well acquainted with his sentiments regarding poachers and such-like.

But his former surprise quite overpowered this, and he did not even make a remark.

"I need not say any more to convince you that I cannot do as you have said," exclaimed Dick. "But if you will take down what I have said, I am ready to sign it in your presence. More I cannot do; and I must leave it to your skill as a lawyer to make the best use possible of the information I have given you."

Mr. Steel inclined his head, and Dick continued:

"But this is not all: I will also sign another document that will prove that the half-brother of the late Marquis of Belgarde will never claim the estates, and consequently Sir Humphrey's daughter will succeed to the whole of the property."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Steel, with additional wonderment. "Is it possible you can do this?"

"You shall judge. The half-brother I have mentioned has been for years my closest and most intimate friend. I would have sacrificed my life a thousand times over to have saved him from harm, and yet, by an accursed chance, it was my hand which deprived him of life."

"Your hand?"

"Yes. It was by the purest accident, though it will never cease to prey upon me with heart-corroding remorse. And yet, if he had been put to his choice, poor fellow, he would have infinitely preferred dying by my hand to falling into the power of his foes and ending his days at Tyburn."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the bewildered lawyer.

"Of my best friend—of the truest, noblest fellow that ever breathed—of one who has of late been known as Tom King, the highwayman."

"Tom King?" ejaculated the baronet and Mr. Steel in chorus.

"Yes, or I should say of the Marquis of Belgarde; and to prove to you that he was no other, I will relate you his life as he related it to me. It was under a solemn pledge of secrecy; but had he the power, he would not blame me for breaking the trust if he knew that it was to prevent the perpetration of a fraud, and to assist Sir Humphrey's daughter to obtain possession of her own."

Dick then told the whole history of Tom King, not omitting one particular.

The climax of Mr. Steel's amazement was now reached.

He was intimately acquainted with all the details of the

affair, and found that what Dick said exactly tallied throughout.

"And you will sign a declaration of all this?"

"Most willingly. I rejoice to think I have the power of making this atonement—for so I consider it—for the evil I have done; and my only regret is that I cannot do more."

"Don't let that be a regret, then," said the lawyer. "You have done more than enough already. I have been in practice now a great many years, and consequently have had a tolerable insight into life; but this is altogether unparalleled—absolutely unparalleled."

"I should rather think so!" exclaimed the baronet.

"There is only one thing," added Dick, "and that is, that the declarations must be signed now. My enemies are close at hand, and searching in every direction for me. I shall have to take the greatest precaution to elude them. To return here again would be wholly out of the question—to stay very long would be dangerous to a degree."

"You think they will track you, then?"

"I do."

"Then not a moment shall be lost. And if I can do anything for you, depend upon it I will."

"Many thanks."

"I will set about the declarations now."

He touched a bell as he spoke.

The tinkling sound was the first intimation Dick received of what had taken place.

Had he been aware in time, he would most likely have urged some objections to the adoption of such a course.

Now, however, it was too late to interfere.

A profound silence followed.

At least a moment elapsed, and then Mr. Steel exclaimed:

"Where the devil has Rogers gone to that he does not answer the bell?"

And again he repeated the summons, this time ringing with all the violence he was capable of.

But no better result followed.

Dick's suspicions, ever on the alert, were now thoroughly and completely roused.

"We must find out where Mr. Rogers is without further delay," he said, in very significant tones.

He crossed the room with a rapid step as he pronounced the words, and opened the door quietly.

He peeped out first; but the entrance-hall of the lawyer's house was deserted.

Not a sign of a human being could be seen.

Dick emerged.

The first thing which attracted his attention was that the front door was ajar.

Hastening to it, he peeped out; but seeing nothing of a suspicious nature, he quickly closed it again.

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you make of all this? What are you going to do?"

"What has taken place is clear enough," was the calm response. "Your clerk—whom I distrusted the moment I saw him—has managed to hear enough of our conversation to know who I am. Having learned this, he has set off to fetch the officers; doubtless they will be here in a few moments."

"And can you stand there like that and talk quietly about such an event?" cried the lawyer, aghast. "I am past being surprised to-night, or I should be astounded now."

Dick smiled.

"All will be well," he said—"take my word for it. First of all, let us proceed to business, for time is precious. Believe me," he added, with a smile, "there is not a moment to be lost."

"Well, you are certainly the most extraordinary—But there, such words as those do waste time. What do you want me to do?"

"Why, to put my communication into as few words as you possibly can, and then I will sign and attest it."

"But you are running too much risk by remaining here like this. If you really think that the clerk has gone out for the purpose of fetching the police officers, you ought not to hesitate a moment, but be off at once."

It was Sir Humphrey Yeomans who spoke.

"Leave that to me," answered Dick, with a coolness seemed to his two auditors to be nothing short of

madness. "Go on with the writing. As for you, Sir Humphrey," he added, "you ought to understand by this time that I am not the worst hand in the world at eluding police officers."

"That's true enough, I admit; and how on earth you could have managed to get here while the officers are keeping such a sharp look-out in every quarter, passes my comprehension."

Dick made no other reply to this speech than a smile, for he could perceive that their voices confused the lawyer a little, who was desirous of being as brief as possible, and yet most anxious not to omit any circumstance of importance.

For a time, then, there was absolute silence, broken only by the chirping of the lawyer's quill pen as it hurried over the paper.

Dick, in the meanwhile, was listening intently; but without suffering any sign to appear that he was doing so.

Unknown to either the baronet or the lawyer, he had, at the moment when he closed the front door, not only turned the key in the lock, but also slipped a bolt into its socket.

Having done this, he was quite sure the clerk would not be able to enter either suddenly or noiselessly.

There was a little anxiety perceptible in the glance which he bent upon the lawyer, who was still writing away as if for a wager.

Sir Humphrey seemed plunged into a deep fit of meditation.

Dick was standing close to the door of the lawyer's sanctum.

As this was open he commanded a good view of a portion of the entrance-hall and the front door.

Presently the sound of a stealthy footstep outside came upon his ear.

It stopped upon the threshold.

Then an effort was quietly made to push the door open; but being fastened, of course it was a failure.

The whispering of several voices followed.

Dick turned his eyes towards the baronet and Mr. Steel.

Neither appeared aware of what had taken place so far.

Sir Humphrey looked to be in a profounder meditation than ever.

The lawyer's pen was going at a wonderful rate; but as his face was bent down towards the table, Dick could not note its expression.

The conversation outside was not of very long continuance.

It was terminated by some one raising the ponderous knocker on the door, and banging it down once with great violence.

The sound echoed and re-echoed through the house.

Sir Humphrey started up, looking as scared as if he had been shot.

Mr. Steel dropped his pen, which, in return, discharged a large blot of ink on the white paper.

"God bless me!" he ejaculated. "What's that?"

"Don't be alarmed," returned Dick, with unruffled composure. "It's only Rogers come back."

"Only Rogers! Well, that's a good one, certainly! But come, I have just finished—sign your name."

Dick very readily obeyed this injunction, and wrote his name in full in a tolerably legible hand.

"There," he said, as he threw down the pen, "my mind is lightened of a heavy load. I feel little doubt that what I have written will defeat the machinations of a villain; and my sincere trust is that it will suffice to secure to Sir Humphrey's daughter that which is lawfully her right. Should this be accomplished I shall feel that I have done something towards requiting the priceless service she so generously and freely accorded me."

Dab came the knock at the front door again.

This time it seemed like a full stop to Turpin's speech.

CHAPTER MCXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN RESOLVES TO SET ASIDE HIS VOW.

"WHAT's to be done?" asked Mr. Steel, a little nervously, for the thought just then occurred to him that it would

not be much to his advantage if he was found harbouring and concealing Dick Turpin in his house.

Dick was about to speak, but Sir Humphrey interrupted him.

"Do?" he cried. "Why, I will soon tell you what we must do. By hook or by crook, somehow, we must save this brave fellow. It would be the very height of baseness to allow him to fall into the hands of his enemies."

The lawyer licked his lips, and glared around him in a nervous, despairing way.

"I don't see what is to be done."

"Then I'll tell you," exclaimed Sir Humphrey, quickly. "I have been thinking it over. Lock him up in your big safe yonder, and when the officers come in say that he left some time ago."

"No—no," said Dick. "Many thanks to you, Sir Humphrey, for manifesting so much interest in my safety; but I cannot consent to this. Should suspicion be directed towards my hiding-place, and the door consequently opened, I should have no chance of escape. Besides, both of you would be seriously compromised as well, which is the consideration which weighs most with me. No—no. What I want is to get out of the house with all speed possible. Put me in the way of doing that, and I shall be satisfied—more than satisfied."

Dab—dab!

Those outside were growing impatient, for the bell was pulled violently.

"Now," said Dick, "I dare not stay another second. How can I best leave?"

But the lawyer's wits had either deserted him, or else he had some motive for withholding a reply to Dick's question.

The latter now began to show signs of uneasiness, as well he might.

"Hark!" he said. "Answer me one question. Is there a trap-door at the top of your house?"

"No."

Dick made a gesture of despair.

"But the attic window opens upon the tiles."

"Enough," said Dick. "Farewell! Do not keep the officers any longer. When they enter, try and induce them to depart."

Dick did not stop to say another word.

In point of fact, he had stayed much too long already.

With a rapid bound he gained the passage, and dashed up the staircase.

The knocking now was both loud and incessant.

On gaining the first floor, Dick found himself involved in darkness, but by retaining his grasp upon the balusters he was able to continue his ascent without much extra difficulty or delay.

Finding himself at the top, he groped about until he found a door.

Where it led he knew not; but he adopted the course most calculated to remove his ignorance on this point, for he lifted the latch without a second's hesitation.

A scream instantly ensued; but Dick, nevertheless, crossed the threshold, closed the door after him, and bolted it.

"Hush!" he said. "Make no sound—you have nothing to fear."

But finding this mild remonstrance had not the effect of silencing the female, he had recourse to threats.

"Another sound like that," he exclaimed, in a furious voice, "and it will be your last! Your head shall be severed from your body at one blow!"

This produced perfect stillness.

The bed-room was very dark, but yet not so profoundly so as to prevent Dick from ascertaining the position of the window, though it was covered with a curtain.

He grasped this, and not stopping to draw it to one side, gave it a sudden snatch, which brought down the whole of it upon him, well-nigh smothering him with dust.

But the next moment he had the little lattice window open, and was crouching down on all-fours on the tiles.

The roof of the lawyer's house was tremendously steep, but it was protected by a very low parapet.

This was not very far below Dick, and he cautiously suffered himself to slip down until his feet rested against it.

Then, carefully raising himself, he peeped over in order to ascertain whether he was at the front or the back of the house.

He fancied the former, and found that he was not mistaken.

He had drawn back at first, fancying that the police officers below might see him.

But, upon more careful scrutiny, he discovered that not one of them could be seen.

This was more than Dick had hoped for.

He now looked round him with an anxious glance in the hope of finding some means of descending safely and speedily to the earth.

Before he had time to decide, he was startled by a flash of light and the sound of contentious voices.

Looking behind him, he found that both proceeded from the attic he had just left.

"Curses on her squalling!" he muttered, angrily. "It must have had the effect of bringing the officers at once upon my track."

There could be little doubt about the correctness of this supposition.

She must have told them, too, by what means he had left the chamber, for the window was dashed open with great violence.

Then Dick, finding himself hard pressed, performed a feat which few indeed would have ventured to attempt.

The pieces of smooth stone with which the top of the parapet was coped were certainly less than a foot in width.

Nevertheless, Dick stepped confidently on to this narrow path, and ran with great swiftness to the further extreme of the row of houses.

The officers at the window were so amazed at the performance of this feat that they forgot to move.

Indeed, they expected every moment to see the fugitive fall headlong down.

And one false step, one moment's giddiness, and nothing could have saved Dick from being dashed to pieces on the stones in the street below him.

But upon gaining the end of the parapet he paused.

The moment they saw him still, the officers recovered their motion, and with more haste than was consistent with either prudence or safety, scrambled through the attic window.

Before they had all emerged, however, there arose a general cry of horror.

They had witnessed Dick standing at the end of the parapet, when suddenly, to their intense alarm, they saw him plunge over and disappear.

"He is down!" they cried, with a simultaneous yell—"he has fallen!"

For a second they were so paralysed by the unexpectedness of this event that they knew not what to do.

Then, recovering themselves, they hurried in a straggling line along the gutter, being impelled to ascertain the worst at once.

The corner was reached, but it took them four times as long at the very least to do it as Dick occupied.

Shuddering in anticipation of the awful sight which would be presented to them in the street below, they peeped over the abyss.

They looked down.

The ground was not very clearly discernible, it is true; yet they were certain they should be able to see so large an object as a man on the flagstones.

But there was nothing—positively nothing.

They stared at each other aghast.

"Where is he?" was the general question.

No one could reply.

Had they not all witnessed the same thing, they might have been in doubt as to what had occurred.

But there was no fear of this.

All had seen him plainly.

Where was he?

To have reached the ground unhurt after leaping from so great a height and afterwards to have run away was so incredible as not to be worth a moment's thought.

No less impossible did it seem for him to have leaped to the next pile of building, which was the width of a wide street distant—some thirty feet at least.

Had he dissolved himself into air, his vanishment could not have been more complete.

Amazement now gave place to consternation, which was so great that the officers could do nothing but gaze blankly at each other for some moments.

Recovering, they searched about in the hope of finding out something or other—they knew not what—by means of which the descent had been accomplished.

But there was nothing save the almost smooth brick walls.

Compelled at last to confess themselves entirely beaten, they turned away with the intention of making their way down into the street, vaguely hoping that they might find something here which would put them on the way of clearing up this great mystery.

But they took the precaution of leaving one of their number on the housetop.

Although they lost not a moment, yet, as a matter of course, they were some time before they reached the right spot, which they had no difficulty in finding.

Here, however, they failed to find anything that held out the faintest promise of giving them a clue.

"We have been deceived," said one—"I feel sure of it."

"But how?" asked another. "Did not we all of us see him jump down? And now where is he?—neither below nor above, that I am quite certain."

Leaving them to clear up this matter in the best way they were able, we will take the reader at once out of the dark.

First, however, we should state that these officers formed no part of Skellum's band, but were a portion of the city constabulary, to the head office of which the clerk had gone after overhearing that his master's strange visitor was no other than Dick Turpin, for whose arrest so large a reward was offered.

Whether Skellum would have been as much at fault in the present business as they were, we will leave the reader to judge for himself after the explanation of what took place has been given.

At the moment, then, when Dick reached the end of the row of houses, he gave himself up to despair.

He thought that the only course left open to him was to turn at bay and die defending himself from his foes, for to overleap the space intervening between him and the next block of building was out of the power of mortal man, and there were no means visible by which he could even hope to accomplish a descent.

It was just at this juncture that he caught sight of a huge waggon loaded with straw.

It was creeping along very slowly, for the horses were weary and the burden almost beyond their powers of draught.

The straw had been piled up to what seemed to be a most dangerous height.

It was, however, well secured by numerous wainropes.

It could be likened to nothing but a huge stack of straw on wheels.

As Dick's eyes fell upon it, an idea suggested itself to his mind.

Compared with the distance to the street below, that which intervened between himself and the top of the waggon seemed trifling, though the reader may be sure that it was by no means inconsiderable.

Dick's idea was the desperate one of springing from the parapet to the moving mass beneath.

It was a reckless, daring deed, such as no one would think of attempting unless he valued his life most lightly.

To Dick, however, any fate was preferable to falling into the hands of his foes.

That was a triumph he was firmly determined they should never gain.

If he remained where he stood, death was certain.

If he essayed the frightful leap, there was a faint chance of escape.

Consequently, he had everything to gain, and nothing to lose, by making the attempt.

It cannot be said that he paused thus to reason with himself.

In point of fact, he did not; but these conclusions seemed present to him as though he had arrived at them by a long course of reflection.

Accordingly, he made the terrific spring.

The straw-laden waggon was immediately beneath him, and luckily close to the side of the road.

In a second Dick felt he had alighted upon the yielding, slippery mass; but he was breathless, and almost powerless.

Yet he had sense enough left to be aware that he was sliding down—falling.

With that irresistible instinct common to everyone in such cases he clutched madly with his hands in order to check his descent.

Yet down he went until his convulsive grasp encountered something tangible.

He held on with the death-grip of a drowning man.

It was a rope which he had touched, and his fingers closed round it with a pressure that scarce any power could have loosened.

In this manner, hanging by the side of the waggon, he was carried for some distance—until, indeed, he recovered himself sufficiently to comprehend where he was, and recollect what had happened.

By this time, the waggon, having turned a corner, carried him completely out of sight of the house from the top of which he had leaped, so that his foes did not even catch a sight of the vehicle which had enabled him to escape.

Dick's strength was tried severely by hanging there, with his whole weight supported by his hands; and his first consideration when he recovered possession of his faculties was, how he should extricate himself from his present uncomfortable position.

He glanced up to the top of the waggon.

The driver was in perfect ignorance of what had occurred; and Dick thought that if he could only manage to climb up on to the top of the straw by means of the cross rope he held by it would be an excellent means of getting out of the city unseen and undetected.

But, alas! he had hung down too long for him to retain the amount of strength sufficient for the performance of this feat.

He tried often before he relinquished the attempt, but each trial was feebler than the one which preceded it, and all he accomplished was the exhaustion of his own strength.

Eventually, with a heavy sigh, he was compelled to own to himself that the achievement was impossible.

He found it hard, however, to abandon this project, for the more he reflected upon it, the more certain he felt it would enable him to get clear of the city without leaving the slightest clue behind him.

But abandon it he must; and therefore, with true philosophy, he gave up speculating upon that which was impossible, and turned the whole of his attention towards the consideration of what he might perform.

One course only appeared to lay open to him.

That was to choose the earliest moment and the best opportunity for letting go his hold upon the rope and dropping to the ground.

It was most lucky for him that the streets were so completely deserted, otherwise he must have been seen clinging to the side of the waggon by the first chance pedestrian.

Looking around as well as the darkness would allow, he found that he was in a street of a particularly quiet character.

Surely, if any place was suited to the accomplishment of his purpose, this was.

He determined to hesitate no longer.

Giving a kind of spring backward, so that in alighting he should escape the wheels, he released the rope.

He measured his spring so well that he alighted upon his feet without experiencing much of a shock, though he was unable to keep his balance.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he remained in this position until the waggon had passed on to what he considered to be a safe distance.

The driver was as unconscious of what had taken place as he was on the former occasion, and the ponderous vehicle continued on its slow but uninterrupted course.

"I must get out of York," he murmured, as he rose slowly to his feet, and brushed the dirt from his soiled apparel. "It will be madness to remain here any longer. What an escape," he added, accompanying the words with a long-drawn breath. "Who else, I wonder, would have ventured such a leap as that?"

Looking back, the feat he had performed seemed to him

to be ten times more prodigious than when he had resolved upon it.

"My time has not yet come," he said to himself; and it appeared as though he tried hard to convince himself that he really thought this as well as said it. "I feel no inward monitor to tell me that my career is over. At any rate, I was not destined to perish through taking that leap."

He walked on with more briskness than might have been expected, considering the state he was in; but his recent miraculous escape—for so we may in justice term it—revived in his breast those hopes of quitting England, and made the prospect of doing so seem ten times more reasonable.

Which was the nearest and best way out of the city, he had not the remotest notion, yet he kept on.

His back was turned towards the old Minster, and he was aware that if he only preserved one straight, undeviating course, he must, sooner or later, leave the city behind him.

In his progress he gazed keenly at every shadow, and when any slight or unexpected sound struck upon his ear he would instantly assume a posture of defence, as though he feared the attack of some hidden enemy.

He was agreeably surprised to find that he was much nearer the suburbs than he had dared to anticipate, and when he saw the open country before him the sight seemed to infuse fresh vigour into his wearied frame.

"I wonder, now," he said, "in what direction I am going? It is rather important that I should satisfy myself upon this point. How can I do so?"

He paused a moment, and then said:

"It is easy enough. I ought to have thought of that before. The stars are shining brightly, so that I shall have no difficulty in ascertaining my position."

He looked up at the star-bespangled firmament as he spoke.

He knew enough of the constellations to pick out the polar star, and this amount of knowledge had on more than one occasion stood him in good stead.

"I am going eastward," he muttered, in a satisfied tone. "This is just as I could wish. Can it be possible that Fortune now is about to turn my friend, and help me out of all my difficulties? It will be a pleasant thing to think so, at any rate."

In this respect he was right enough, and he trudged along the far-stretching high-road with redoubled energy. It was not likely, however, that he would be able to continue thus very long, and so it proved.

Indeed, his strength gave out much sooner than he had expected, and consequently, though it was much against his will, he sat himself down by the roadside to rest awhile.

"I have overrated my powers," he said, sadly. "Who would have thought that I should be reduced to such a stage of feebleness? Old age seems to have dropped upon me all at once. I must be many, many miles now from the sea coast—so many that while in my present state it would be absolute insanity upon my part to dream of attempting it on foot; yet, if so, what other means of locomotion shall I adopt? Let me think—let me think."

He rested his head between his hands.

Some moments elapsed before he spoke again, and when he did speak the words were only half uttered, as they often are by persons who have no one to commune with save themselves.

"With a horse," he murmured, "I feel sure I could do it easily enough, and, what is more, in one fifth part of the time. But yet, where am I to obtain one? And besides, have I not said that I would suffer anything rather than cross another steed, accompanying it with the wish that if I ever attempted to do so the very worst evils might befall me? Yes, yes—a horse is out of the question."

But the advantages which would result from his availing himself of the services of one pressed more and more strongly upon his imagination—to such an extent, indeed, that presently, lifting up his head and looking around him, he exclaimed, in a louder voice:

"But is it not childish and foolish in the extreme to be the slave of such a feeling as this? Surely—oh, surely yes! They were hastily-spoken, ill-considered words, wrong from me by remorse; but when I uttered them I

could not look into the future and see what would occur. Besides, it is paramount that I should use every endeavour to secure my own safety; and in thus refusing the assistance that would be afforded me by a horse, I am throwing every chance away.

"Yes, yes," he added, after another pause—"my mind is now quite made up. Every rule has its exception. I will renew my vow never to seek an adventure of any kind with another steed, but that must not prevent me from taking one when I see how imperatively necessary it is to my escape."

Having come to this conclusion, he arose.

But, strange to say, there was a heaviness now upon his mind for which he tried vainly to account, and which he as fruitlessly endeavoured to shake off.

Was it a premonition that his wish would be fulfilled?

The thought occurred to him, but he refused to dwell upon it.

"Let me think," he cried, as though resolute to keep his ideas fixed on one point—"let me consider which will be the best and most advantageous means of obtaining a horse. Where shall I look for one?"

This was indeed a point that required much careful consideration.

Secrecy was all-important.

Scarcely less so was it that the animal should be a good one, and properly equipped for the road.

"I have it!" he cried at length, rising from his seat. "I will walk on quietly along the road. I must before going very far come up with a public-house; here, if the place holds out any hopes, I will enter, and being there, will ask to buy a horse. I feel certain that I have not yet been in this part. Every object is quite strange to me, therefore I may infer that the police officers have not been here either. What fear, then, is there that I shall be recognised? At any rate, I will run the risk."

This was, to all intents and purposes, settling the matter.

Strangely enough, the next turning brought him in view of a light, which, upon a closer approach, he found proceeded from a habitation.

Whether an inn or not, he knew not.

But he was soon relieved of all uncertainty upon this head, for, by the faint light of the stars, he presently caught sight of a swinging sign, of unusually large dimensions, which was fixed on the top of a stout post.

"A good omen," he said. "Surely I am justified in looking upon this as a foretoken of good fortune in the future. No sooner have I come to a decision than I behold the place which of all others I most wished to see. Yes, yes—the end is drawing nigh. All—all will be well."

In one sense he was right.

He tried to infuse some gladness into the tone in which he spoke.

But no failure could be more complete.

His lips declared that all was well; but his heart seemed to whisper that so far from such being the case, all was ill, and that, so far from escaping, he was rushing blindly and madly to his doom.

Which was right, heart or lips? We shall quickly see.

CHAPTER MCXXIII.

LICK TURPIN FALLS A VICTIM TO THE TREACHERY OF THE OSTLER.

It did not take him long to reach the inn, or rather a portion of the outbuildings adjoining it which abutted upon the road.

"Hullo!" said a voice, suddenly. "And may I ask where you are off to at this time of night?"

Dick gave a tremendous jump, for he had not the least idea that anyone was present.

Upon hearing this voice, however, and on collecting himself a little, he caught a glimpse of a thin, wiry man, who was leaning in a negligent attitude against the post of the gate leading into the stable-yard.

Although Dick soon recovered himself from the first shock of surprise, yet he was far from feeling comfortable at finding he had not been alone.

What was more, he could not in the then agitated state

of his spirits pretend to recollect what had passed his lips a short time before.

The man unquestionably had heard him.

Unless he had done so he would scarcely have addressed the fugitive in the way he did.

Dick's fear was that his incautious words would give this man a clue to his identity.

"You look as scared as though you had been up to no good," the man continued, after a long pause. "Do you always start like that when you are asked a civil question?"

His interest in Dick seemed to increase, for while thus speaking he quitted his indolent position and came closer to the roadway.

Dick then for the first time perceived that this man was attired in the garb of an ostler; and, moreover, there was about him an indescribable something which proclaimed his profession.

On discovering this, Dick's feelings underwent an entire change.

An idea occurred to him which represented itself in so favourable a light that he resolved to act upon it without delay or further deliberation.

"You may think yourself lucky," were the first words Dick spoke.

That they very much puzzled the ostler the stare of astonishment he gave sufficiently testified.

"Lucky!" he repeated, at length. "What for?"

"For having seen me."

"How so?—why?"

"Because I can put you in the way of earning in an hour more money than you could get for a year's wages."

"And pray how?—some devilry or other, I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort; I want you to render me a service, for the faithful performance of which I am ready and willing to pay liberally."

"Indeed! And no risk to me?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, then, I'm your man—what do you want?"

"Firstly, that you will keep my presence here a secret from everyone."

"That's easily done."

"Scarcely more easily than the rest."

"Go on, then."

"You must procure me a horse of the best quality, with trappings complete; and put me in the way of reaching the sea-shore at the nearest point where I can obtain a vessel."

"And what else?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing whatever."

"And what are you willing to pay for this?"

"Why, more for the secrecy than anything."

"You are off on the mizzle, then?"

"The what?"

"The mizzle. You have been up to something and want to get off."

"Suppose that is the case—are you willing to earn a good round sum by assisting me? No one will know anything of your share in the transaction—provided you are wise enough to keep a still tongue in your head."

"Trust me for that."

"Do you consent?"

"I do; but I must know about the amount before I stir hand or foot."

"You shall have fifty pounds."

"Not enough."

"A hundred, then."

"That's more like it."

"I will give you no more; you can either take it or decline the business altogether."

"Well, I shan't do that."

"Can you get me a horse?"

"I can; nothing could have fallen out better."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I have one in the stable now that a gentleman has left here for me to sell to the best customer I can get. It is a real beauty; but, not to deceive you, I am very spirited, and requires a devilish good rider to master him."

"I should like him all the better on that very account."

"Then you couldn't be better suited. Then it's a bargain. Give me your hand—there now, it's all right."

Come into the stable; it's not worth while to stand out here in the cold."

"You are quite right—it is not."

Accordingly, Dick followed the ostler across the spacious inn-yard to the door of the stables, though in his progress he was careful to keep one hand upon the butt of a pistol in such a way that he could instantly avail himself of the service of the weapon should circumstances require it.

But the ostler walked straight across without once turning his head, and Dick was fully impressed with the belief that he was acting in good faith.

Yet, with proper caution, he resolved that the belief should not deprive him of vigilance, for as yet he did not know the man.

The interior of the stable boasted no better illumination than that which a candle stuck into a lantern afforded, and yet, by contrast with the darkness without, the light seemed almost brilliant.

Dick, who had been in the obscurity so long, could not help blinking a little.

The first thing the ostler did was to turn round and indulge himself in a good long stare.

His eyes opened wider and wider, until all at once, with a wild cry, he seized hold of Dick's hand and wrung it warmly.

"Why, captain—captain, whoever could have thought it was you! And to find you in such a plight, too! Well—well, I thought your voice sounded as though I had heard it before, though I could not recollect where. I am glad to see you—heartyly glad. But you must tell me how it is I find you in such sad trim as this. Why, you are almost a skeleton!"

Dick was, if anything, more astonished at this second recognition than he was at the first.

There could be no mistaking the fact that the ostler knew him; and, judging by his manner, the circumstance seemed to afford him the keenest delight and satisfaction.

"Why, captain," he continued, shaking Dick's hand again with almost painful violence, "don't you know me—don't you remember me? Don't look so scared. You have found a friend now if you never had one before."

"Thanks—thanks!" said Dick, in reply to this assurance, which we need scarcely tell the reader sounded most sweetly in his ears. "I was overcome at first, but don't be surprised at that. Nothing was further from my thoughts than that I should be recognised in this part of the country."

"De you know me now, captain?"

Dick passed his hand over his brow, as though striving to remember.

"I see, you have forgotten me."

"I see so many faces," answered Dick, "that——"

"Of course you do. Well, well—it don't matter. I know you, and that is quite as well—perhaps better. Don't be afraid to trust me. I am your friend."

He struck himself lightly on the breast as he spoke, as though he meant to indicate that his heart was entirely at the service of the fugitive.

Dick smiled.

"To utter my thanks would be impossible; but they shall speak in deeds. And now, where is the horse you spoke of?"

"Yonder. But before you go to look at him, let us have some talk. I think it will be to the benefit of both of us."

There was an earnestness in the man's tones that seemed to constrain Dick to listen.

"Are you going to leave the country for a time?"

"For ever."

"What, quit the road? Never, captain—nonsense—you must be joking!"

"Believe me, I am most serious. I have had my last adventure on the road."

Either a shadow was cast by the flickering candle at this moment upon the ostler's countenance, or else it underwent a change; but it was so transient that it was impossible to say which of the two it was, or whether it was either.

"You think so now, captain," he said; "but you won't long remain in that mind, I'll warrant."

"Indeed I shall. Nothing will induce me to alter."

"But—but what has brought about this change?"



[THE CAPTURE OF DICK TULLIN AT THE ROADSIDE INN.]

"I have lost all my friends—not one of my associates is left to me. Even Black Bess is lost to me for ever; and the remains of one I loved dearer than life and the whole world lie under the sod of another land! My heart has been too much bruised and wounded for me to become a sight of the road again."

"Pooh—pooh, captain! Take my word for it, that is all stuff. You will soon get the better of it, and then you will wonder how ever it was that you came to have such ideas. Don't shake your head in that solemn way. You will find out I am right before long."

"No—no—a thousand times no!"

"Have you, then, really made up your mind?"

"I have."

"Then I am sorry to hear it, and yet not surprised either."

"Why not?"

No 250.—BLACK BESS.

No. 250.

"Because you are reduced to such a dreadful state. You are out of condition, captain—that's what's the matter with you. I know what a horse is when he's out of condition. Lor' bless you—after he has been seen to a bit no one would believe him the same. And men and asses is wonderfully alike, captain, I assure you."

Dick smiled at this, but shook his head again to imply that his determination was unshaken.

"I am right," continued the ostler; "and mark my words—things will turn out to prove it. Let me tell you a man don't live in a stable all his life without being up to a thing or two."

"I am weak and ill, I know," returned Dick; "but you would not wonder at that if you knew what I have gone through; still it would have no effect upon my determination—it has long been taken."

"Well, captain, of course I ain't going to presume to

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to dictate to you, of course, but I'm not going to hold an argument with you either while you are in your present state."

"Indeed?"

"I am quite in earnest. It is folly for you to think of continuing your journey while you are in your present state. You couldn't do it. You shall stop here awhile. I'll keep you snug enough, never fear, and I will get you plenty of good things, and you will soon have your strength back again."

Dick was never in all his life more in the humour to be persuaded than he was then, and at the very time the ostler was speaking such a frightful feeling of fatigue and weakness came over him that he had much difficulty in saving himself from falling.

The keen-eyed ostler noticed his condition, and cried:

"What did I tell you! If you persist in leaving here while you are like this you will be nabbed before you are half a dozen hours older."

"But could you conceal me," asked Dick, anxiously, "supposing the officers should call here?"

"I'll take care of all that. Look here, captain—just you follow me."

So saying, the ostler crossed the stable to a place where a ladder was fixed perpendicularly against the wall.

Up this he climbed with the agility which long practice had given him.

In the twinkling of an eye he was upon the loft above holding his hand to assist Dick in the ascent.

The best way to give an idea of the pitiable condition to which Dick Turpin was reduced will be to say that this task was almost beyond his powers, and that he would never have accomplished it without the aid of his new friend.

"Now, captain," the ostler said, as soon as Dick had gained the floor of the loft above, "you see this here place. Good. Well, I will keep you here as snug as you wish for as long as you think proper. I'll take care that no one finds out where you are, and will guarantee you as much as ever you want in the shape of eating and drinking."

"I assure you your offer is a most agreeable one, and I am more than half inclined to accept of it."

"Have a whole mind, captain, and rely upon it you will be all right. How can anyone have the least suspicion you are here. And if you stay you will not only be getting your strength up, but the heat of the pursuit after you will have cooled a little."

"I will stay," said Dick, with sudden resolution. "Fortunately, I have enough left even in this extremity of my fortunes to reward you most liberally for all that you may do for me."

"We shan't fall out over that, captain, I am sure. Now listen to what I am going to say."

Dick flung himself down wearily upon the hay with which the floor of the loft was covered.

"That's right, captain," cried the ostler, approvingly. "Take all the rest you can."

"What were you going to propose?"

"Why, that you stayed here until you had regained your strength. Of course, as I said before, I shall supply you with everything for that purpose. Then, at the proper time, I shall mount you on the horse I spoke of, and he will carry you to the sea-coast like a rocket. He is truly a wonderful animal."

Dick could not help being sensible that the ostler's advice was good, and that he could not do better than follow it in every particular, yet so much had he fixed his mind upon continuing his journey to the coast, that he could hardly make himself satisfied to pause anywhere.

But this feeling was not so overpowering as to blind him to the fact that it would be by no means lost time to remain here until he was stronger, because then he would be able to perform the journey in half the time he would be obliged to take while in his present condition.

"I can see you have decided, captain," the ostler continued; "I am glad of it, for you always treated me like a prince in the good old times, and nothing pleases me so much as to be able to do something in return for a favour."

He did not wait to see whether Dick had any more to say, but lowered himself down into the stable again.

It was not long, however, before he returned, bringing

with him a very tempting supply of provisions, together with a bottle of wine.

"There," he said, "just let me see you polish that lot off; and when you have you will be disposed to take a more cheerful view of the future than you do now."

Dick ate heartily, and found the wine particularly agreeable and refreshing.

"Now, captain, am I not right?"

"I am better."

"Of course you are. Now, look here: it is too late now for you to think of leaving here to-night, even if you had made your mind up to do so, because we shall have daylight here in no time. So just make yourself as comfortable as you can on the top of the hay, and then if you don't like to stay any longer you will be ready to start to-morrow night as soon as darkness sets in."

Dick willingly enough assented to this, and after a few more words the ostler left the loft.

The reader will not require to be told that Dick now felt himself under circumstances of greater security than he had known for a long time past; and therefore it is not surprising that he should fall asleep very soon after being left alone.

It was rather strange, though, that he should place so much confidence in this ostler, but somehow the idea of being doubtful of his good faith never once occurred to him.

There was such an air of jollity and truth about him that suspicion was blinded and disarmed.

Perhaps had Dick not been so utterly "out of condition," as the ostler phrased it, he would have been a little cautious, and that there was great need of caution will be quickly seen.

No sooner had the ostler reached the stable than he sat himself down upon the corn-bin in an attitude of deep thought.

What reflections were passing in his mind it would be hard for anyone to say.

That they were important, however, there could be no doubt.

At last he began to mutter in an undertone.

His words ran to something like the following effect:

"Which way shall I decide? Bless if I can tell! But I must make up my mind one way or other. Is his race run?—that is the question. If I could only get a reply to that I should know how to act."

He rose up as he spoke, for a faint sound from above fell upon his ears.

After listening for a second, and finding it was not repeated, he leaned his arms on the lower portion of the stable door and looked out into the darkness.

"He seems determined enough to quit the road," he continued; "and I have heard say before now, that when he once made up his mind to a thing there was no turning him. Let me see. Suppose it is so—why, should not I be a downright idiot to let him get off for the sake of a hundred pounds or so! Of course I should!"

Having settled this point, he remained for a short time silent.

But his mutterings soon recommenced.

"My business is to make the most money—that's just the long and the short of it. If I am careful and move right, I am in for a good haul—such an amount as will make me independent for the rest of my days. But one false step, and I lose the lot."

The ostler's excitement continued to increase.

"Let me see," he said, "I will get the bill out again, and see just how much is offered for his apprehension. Let me make sure about that."

He sat himself down again upon the corn-bin, and from a tattered pocket-book produced one of the printed bills offering the reward for the apprehension of Dick Turpin.

Unfolding it upon his knee, he spelt it over carefully.

First, the amount offered for his safe lodgment in any one of his Majesty's prisons was one thousand pounds, and five hundred pounds more on his conviction and execution.

The ostler gave a long-drawn sigh, and returned the bill to his pocket-book.

"That's clear enough," he said. "But can I net the whole amount?—that's the question. There is a doubt about that—so let me see how much I should be likely to make by standing his friend."

This seemed no easy thing to arrive at.

"He said he would reward me liberally—and I should understand that word to mean a thousand pounds, but I don't suppose he does. Has he got anything like such a sum about him? That is just what I should like to find out; and I don't intend, either, to lose sight of the old proverb about a bird in the hand."

From the foregoing it will be seen that this north-country ostler had no higher motive than many of our most illustrious men—to adopt that course which would turn out most profitable to himself—or, in other words, to dispose of his fidelity to the person who bid the highest price for it.

If Dick had only got enough to satisfy his avarice, Justice might catch her prisoner herself.

This important point—because it would entirely influence his future conduct—the ostler determined to clear up, and the means he took to do this were as bold as they were effectual.

As silently as possible, he made his way up into the loft.

Dick was slumbering heavily.

"It would take rather more than a trifle to wake him now," he murmured. "That wine was strong, and he was quite exhausted. It would be easy enough to find out how much he is worth, and I don't think there would be much fear of waking him up either. At any rate, I shall run the risk."

With these words the ostler very cautiously and gently made an examination of Dick's pockets.

It was not very easy to make an estimate of what he was worth, because the greater part of the wealth was in the more portable shape of precious stones.

He restored everything as he had found it and slipped down into the stable again.

"Samuel," he said, addressing himself—"Samuel, you have a difficult course before you. One is right, the other is wrong. What have I to guide me in my choice? All depends upon it. I shall either get all or nothing. Shall I befriend him, and be content with perhaps an amount equal to one-third of the reward? I must think."

Samuel did think, but he found it by no means easy to come to a decision.

There were no scruples in the case.

His sole anxiety, as we have said before, was to do that which would bring him the most money.

Whether Dick was hanged, or whether he escaped, was to him equally indifferent.

He had no more regard for serving Justice than he had compunction in meditating the betrayal of one who had placed such utter confidence in him.

"Suppose I make up my mind to give him up, what are the difficulties in the way?—what chance have I of getting the money; and how much risk of losing it? I will sit down again; I can always think with a clearer head when I am sitting on the corn-bin.

"It would never do to call in any assistance," he ruminated, "and certainly not the police, because they would want to share the reward, and I could not afford that. No, no—I must scheme it somehow. Supposing I was to bind him tightly with plenty of rope, and then, without saying a word to anybody, to put a horse into one of the carts and drive to York Castle with him? I don't see anything very difficult about that; and when once I had handed him over to the Governor's charge I should be making sure of a thousand pounds. No one could gainsay my claim to it—certainly not."

Yet the ostler was not satisfied. He could hardly bring himself to believe that it was possible he should become possessed of so large an amount.

The blood tingled in his veins, and for some time the excitement produced by his anticipations was so great that he could do nothing but yield himself up to the influence of a kind of waking dream.

At last a thought returned.

"How easy it would be to bind him now that he lies sleeping—there would be an end to it. He could not resist. He would be powerless. Fool—fool that I was not to think of that before! What valuable time I have permitted to slip by! It is now too late, though—now too late, of course!"

And it was too late, for, to his infinite chagrin, he

found, on once more making his way into the hay-loft that Dick was awake.

What had aroused him it was, of course, impossible to guess.

The ostler showed himself to be an accomplished dissembler.

"I thought I heard you moving, captain," he said, with the utmost self-possession, and without the ruffling of a single feature, "and so I came up to see what you wanted."

"Thanks—thanks," said Dick—"all is so far well. What is the time?"

"Just about sunrise, captain."

"Alas—alas!"

"What is the matter?"

"I have had a dream—an ugly, uncomfortable dream. Bah!—I—"

"Pooh, pooh! captain—you must get the better of this sort of thing."

But Dick shuddered in a way that showed this dream had produced no ordinary impression upon him.

"I will leave here at nightfall," he said—"yes, yes—I will leave here at nightfall. I will take this vision as a warning: nothing shall induce me to stay longer—I fear, indeed, that I have stayed too long already."

"Why, captain, you get worse and worse," cried the ostler, speaking in as pleased a voice as he could affect, and turning aside so as to conceal the baleful-looking light which these words had caused to blaze up in his eyes. "Whatever could this dream be to trouble you so much?"

"I dreamt," said Dick, "that I was in a deep sleep, and yet half conscious of what was going on. But at last I awoke, and when I opened my eyes it was to find that I was surrounded by stone walls; an iron grating was in front of me—I was the inmate of a prison cell."

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE OSTLER DISCOVERS THAT THINGS DO NOT TURN OUT QUITE SO AGREEABLY AS HE ANTICIPATED.

"Now, captain—captain, do not let such a thing as that trouble you—pray, don't," cried the ostler, with a hearty laugh. "After making such a meal as you did, and falling asleep immediately afterwards, you might have expected to dream about that which you were most in dread of."

"It may be so," replied Dick—"it may be so; but I shall not rest again until I am on my journey."

"Oh yes, you will. Keep yourself quiet, or what will you be fit for at night? As soon as the folks in the inn are astrir I will see after your breakfast."

Dick poured out his thanks to this unworthy object, who, feeling uncomfortable at having that which he felt he was not entitled to, feigned that it was necessary to descend into the stable and see to the horses there.

Dick said not a word respecting his departure.

The fact was, his senses were all wrapped up in pondering upon his dream, which had been of unusual vividness.

Samuel no sooner reached the stable than he walked deliberately to the wall and struck his head several times with great violence against it.

"I have been a d—d fool," he muttered, grinding his teeth ferociously. "I do believe I am the d—dest fool alive! Here have I been arguing with myself when I ought to have been at work. If I had had a grain of sense he would have been safe where he dreamt he was."

The ostler was in a state of very great aggravation, and some time elapsed before he could bring himself to anything like calmness.

But a fresh thought occurred to him, which went a good way towards reconciling him to the present aspect of affairs.

"I have often heard," he said, "that nothing is done well which is done in a hurry, and I believe it now. How could I have overlooked such a thing as that? Why, I am a double gainer if I can be successful."

It will quickly be seen to what the treacherous fellow alluded, for he sat himself down in his favourite place, and, holding one hand before him with the fingers outspread, he said:

"Let me take it all over quietly, from first to last, to make sure all is smooth, and to prevent any unexpected

back in the business. Now, first, I will wait till towards nightfall, and then give him a drug either in his food or drink, or both. Good! Then, when he is insensible, I shall make it my first business to search every one of his pockets thoroughly, and make up all his wealth into a parcel, which I will hide carefully. Good again! But what a fool I must have been to think of taking him to prison with all that in his pocket!"

The ostler was for a moment or two so overcome with astonishment that he could not continue his most agreeable meditations.

"Having buried the parcel," he continued, "I will lift him quietly into the cart, and, without his being one bit the wiser, drive him to York Castle. Once there, the authorities will look to him. I shall send in my claim for the entire reward, and then, with that, and what he carries about with him, I shall be rich—rich indeed!"

For some moments he sat like one entranced.

He was quite carried away by the agreeable prospect which he had conjured up.

Already he saw himself—what he so longed to be—a rich man.

At last he started up, and, in tones that certainly were louder than it was prudent to make use of, he cried:

"Were the risk a thousand times what it is, I would do it!"

From this moment his mind remained quite made up.

He did not waver in the least, and so great were his dissimulative powers that no one to have gazed into his countenance would have given a guess at the nature of his thoughts.

True to his promise, he obtained an excellent breakfast for the hunted fugitive, who little guessed in what tremendous danger he stood, though there was a peculiar heaviness about his heart and oppression about his spirits which he ought to have understood and taken as a warning.

But, alas! he did not.

Perhaps never was there anyone in whom Dick was more disposed to place an absolute trust than in this treacherous, mercenary wretch who was so wholly underserving of it.

But Dick throughout all his career had gained so much by trusting people, and suffered so little from treachery, that we cannot blame him, nor wonder at his over-confidence in this instance.

It was a strange thing that during the day Dick could not close his eyes in sleep.

It could not be that he feared anything, for he was wholly ignorant of the ostler's intention.

Perhaps it was the dread of renewing his dream that influenced him in keeping awake.

Whatever the cause was, however, there was the fact—sleep was impossible.

Consequently the day was a tediously long one to Dick.

He had no other means of whiling away the time saving peeping forth from the circular window of the loft, from which, in the distance, a view of York could be obtained.

Strange to say, he saw nothing of the police officers, and as the day elapsed without his having done so his hopes begun to rise and much of the weight was taken off his heart.

All would have been well, no doubt, but for the act of treachery the ostler meditated.

Dick saw but little of him during daylight.

The fact was, he could not drive this matter from his mind, and he was afraid to trust himself much in the presence of his intended victim lest his face should betray the black secret in his heart.

Dick Turpin, as soon as ever it was dusk, left the loft and descended into the stable.

"The coast seems clear, captain," the ostler exclaimed.

"It does. I believe all will be well."

"And you are still determined to give up your life on the road?"

"If possible, more so than I have ever been. My resolution has never wavered."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it, that is all I can say, for of course you are at liberty to adopt whatever course you may think proper."

Dick did not think it worth while to make any reply to this speech.

"Where is the horse you spoke to me about? Let me see him."

"He is a real beauty—he is, and no mistake, and so you'll say. Just look here!"

The ostler lifted the cloth off one of the horses in the stall as he spoke.

Dick looked at him with a critical eye.

"And you say he is a good one?"

"There never was a better; only, as I told you, he takes a good rider. If I was a gentleman I should prefer him for that. I should not care to have an animal that anyone could sit on the back of."

"He will serve my purpose doubtless. What is the price?"

"Only fifty guineas, which is what the owner told me would be the very lowest penny he would take. He cost a hundred, and is well worth it too."

"I will buy him," said Dick, "and you shall have something handsome over and above that amount by way of commission."

The ostler hardly had patience to play his part in this portion of the affair, but he was afraid of doing anything to rouse Dick's suspicions, which would, of course, ruin his project entirely.

"And now," Dick continued, "if you will furnish me with a saddle and a bridle, I will be off without any more delay."

"You shall have both, captain; and, what is more, a bottle of brandy which I have procured for you. Keep it by you—it will prove useful."

"I will taste it now," Dick answered.

This was what the ostler had calculated upon.

As the reader doubtless more than expects, the brandy was drugged.

He gave Dick a glass, who, drawing the cork, nearly filled it with the spirit from the bottle.

"You will find that a drop of splendid stuff, captain. Lor' bless you, I know whereabouts in the cellar master keeps the best of everything—trust me for that! But what's the matter with you?"

Dick had placed the fatal draught to his lips.

It was so long since he had tasted any of his favourite spirit that in his eager haste he swallowed a large mouthful without tasting it.

It was when he paused and licked his lips with the tip of his tongue that the ostler broke off and asked what was the matter.

"It seems to have an odd taste," Dick said.

"Age—age, captain—nothing more. Try it again."

Dick once more placed the glass to his lips.

He sipped dubiously.

A little more had been swallowed, when he happened suddenly to catch sight of the ostler's visage.

The expression upon it told him all as plainly as the longest explanation.

He was betrayed.

The excitement of the ostler had reached fever point; and when he saw Dick in the act of swallowing the second draught, he could no more prevent his features displaying his triumph and exultation than he could have stopped the pulsations of his heart.

This, coupled with the strange taste of the spirit, which was now very noticeable, told Dick that he had been betrayed by the being he had so trusted, and who had spoken so fairly to him.

"Villain!" he shrieked, rather than said, for the consequences of what would follow drinking the drugged brandy rushed with full force upon his brain—"villain! you have betrayed me!"

As he pronounced the last words, he dashed the remainder of the spirit into the rascal's face.

His aim was good.

The ostler was temporarily deprived of sight.

"Base, accursed wretch!" continued Turpin, now in a perfect frenzy. "But you shall not reap the benefit of what you have done! I see through it all! I can at least inflict that punishment upon you!"

So saying, he drew his sword.

It was at this moment that the ostler recovered himself a little.

Maddened with pain, he made a frantic rush upon the fugitive.

He did not see the sword.

Dick held it firmly in front of him, with the hilt pressing against his breast.

The ostler did not pause, and consequently he was impaled upon it.

"Villain!" shrieked Dick. "Take your doom! You did not think that you had been so cleverly plotting your own destruction as well as mine!"

A fearful groan came from the ostler's lips, and, throwing up his arms, he fell backwards to the ground.

When the sword was thus violently withdrawn, the blood gushed forth in a manner that seemed to indicate the wound would prove a mortal one.

"Such a death is too good for you," said Dick, sheathing his sword, all covered with blood as it was. "Yours is a righteous fate, and may such ever be the doom of the traitor!"

He reeled as he spoke, and a strange tumult seemed taking place in his brain.

"What will be the end?" he cried, clasping his hands before his eyes, for they throbbed most painfully—"what will be the end? What was the strength of that accursed drug?"

It was plain that every moment it was asserting its influence.

The dying ostler bent upon him a look of hate that was none the less malignant because so powerless.

"Your race is run," he said. "This is your last deed! But I shall live—live to see you hanging in front of York Castle before many more days are over your head!"

"Never!" screamed Dick, who was now quite maddened by the mixture he had swallowed. "I—I—"

He paused, and again clasped his hands over his painfully-throbbing eyes.

A momentary return of consciousness had taken place.

"What can I do?" he murmured, sadly—"what can I do? Water—water!"

Looking around, his eyes fell upon a stable bucket full of the wished-for liquid.

He intended at first to drink, but his whole brain seemed to be on fire, and it was in obedience to an irresistible impulse that he plunged his head completely into the water.

Oh, how coolly and refreshingly it bubbled round his neck and in his ears!

Thus he remained until want of breath compelled him to withdraw.

He was wonderfully better, and, finding this to be the case, he took a long breath and repeated his bath.

This time he stayed longer still.

He was much refreshed.

His brain was chilled—his eyes no longer seemed as though they would force themselves from their sockets.

"I must not linger here," he said—"this is no place for me. Away—away! If I can but crawl to some lonely spot and lie down and sleep, that will be the best way of getting rid of the effects of the drug. Yes, yes—away—away! I must leave England—England!"

The way in which he finished his sentence showed that the water had only produced a transient effect, and one, too, that was more apparent than real.

He staggered out of the stable.

Fortunately for him, it was growing dusk, and there was no one in sight.

Everything he looked at seemed in motion.

The ground rose and fell under his feet like billows on the ocean.

The symptoms he experienced were just those of complete intoxication.

The fresh air appeared to affect him strongly.

Whether it would enable him to overcome the effects of the drug, or whether it would accelerate its action, was hard indeed to say.

But Dick continued to stumble and stagger on.

Each moment he seemed about to fall, but he would recover his balance miraculously, and resume his devious way.

He knew he was going on, but with that fact it may be said consciousness began and ended.

What lay before him—whether it was turf or roadway on which he trod—whether he was going towards York—were perfect mysteries.

He staidified did he rapidly become that he ceased to

trouble himself in the least degree upon these points, or to feel at all curious about them.

Motion was more mechanical than aught else.

Still, with sleepy, vacant eyes he gazed around, but his glances had no speculation in them.

Yet he felt no desire to sleep.

Whether this was owing to his not having drunk a sufficient quantity of the drug, or his having immersed his head in cold water in the way we have described, we know not.

How long he continued on this staggering course he had no means of judging.

He fancied it must be long, for he was very, very weary.

Painfully he gazed from side to side, looking out for some place of rest, but finding none.

Had he really paused, the probability is that he would very quickly have become totally insensible.

More than one chance passenger stopped to look at him and watch his erratic steps, for his motions were precisely those of a drunken man, and this was what he was taken to be.

Not one of his observers chanced to guess at his identity, and so, without knowing it, they allowed a large sum to slip through their fingers when they might easily have retained it.

But what a strange fatality it was that directed Dick, while in this helpless state, towards the City of York!

Had he turned precisely the opposite way there might have been some chance for him.

But what hope had he in thus rushing blindly upon the spot which of all others threatened him with the most danger!

Yet so it was.

Every step he took was only carrying him nearer to his foes.

But not even in the dreamy way that he knew he was in motion was Dick conscious of this terrible mistake.

With a strange confidence he went on, his mind so utterly stultified that he never for one single instant entertained the suspicion that he might be going wrong.

When he felt so weary that it seemed as though he could not go any further, he caught sight of an inn.

It was not far off, and on the pleasant bit of green lawn—if we may so term it—several rustic seats had been placed for the accommodation of those guests who might prefer to sit *al fresco* in the summer time.

Oh, how inviting those seats looked to the worn-out fugitive!

Could he only sit for a short time on one of them he believed he should recover himself sufficiently to take steps for his ultimate escape.

The temptation was not to be resisted.

Staggering on with the same swaying gait until he reached one of the twisted wood tables, he sat himself down on the seat near it, and immediately buried his burning forehead in his hands.

His approach had been noticed and commented on by several, especially the landlord, who, long pipe in mouth, was watching the progress of a rubber at bowls.

"Francis," he said, addressing himself to the man who was waiting on the customers, "that cove yonder has had enough, it seems to me. Don't fill him any more if you can help it; let him be awhile—he may recover. At any rate, I'll have an eye upon him."

From this it would seem that the landlord entertained no suspicion as to the identity of the new-comer.

Dick had not sat at the table long before two or three labouring men sat down beside him.

The noise made by them aroused him.

The stupefying effects of the drug seemed to have worn off somewhat even in this brief space, but its influence was by no means gone.

It manifested itself in a different manner.

With bloodshot, aching eyes, he glared around him.

He felt frenzied—maddened, impelled to do some outrageous deed or other.

It was as though some demoniac spirit had taken possession of his breast.

He was in the mood to quarrel with anyone—to interfere with anything.

It was such a disposition indeed which is often manifested by those who are in a certain stage of intoxication.

All at once his ears were assailed by a loud cheer coming from many throats.

"What's that?" he hiccuped, in a thick voice, and at the same time half rising—"what's that, I say?"

The game at bowls had just been concluded, and the wager decided.

It would seem that no ordinary interest had attached to the game, and the triumphant sounds were in honour of the victor.

But surely some demon must have taken possession of Dick's body and directed its movements—it hardly seems credible that he acted in accordance with the dictates of his own mind.

After many efforts, he contrived to stand somewhat steadily upon his legs.

Then he rolled his heavy, bloodshot eyes around until he caught sight of the tumultuous group assembled round the players.

No sooner did he comprehend who they were and what they were about than he reeled towards them.

"Who's won?" he asked, elbowing his way among the throng—"who's won, I say?—I don't care who he is, here's a man here that can beat him—I can do it! I'll bowl the winner or anybody here for any money! I'll bet anybody fifty pounds to five shillings I am the winner!"

"What are you all afraid of?" he continued, in a thicker and more inarticulate voice than ever, and looking as though he would be only too glad to enter into a quarrel with anyone upon the slightest provocation. "I ask are you all afraid, or do you think I have no money about me? If that's it you're wrong. Look here! What do you think of that, now?"

While speaking, he plunged his hand into his pocket and drew forth as many guineas as he could grasp.

"Here you are. Here's money enough, and I'll bet you all I tell you!"

With the utmost recklessness, he flung the coins upon the nearest table, upon which many remained, but more fell off and rolled along the grass.

Such behaviour as this was well calculated to excite the astonishment of the rustics assembled at the inn.

When they saw the gold, they immediately felt a great accession of respect.

The general idea was that he was some gentleman—no doubt a lord—who was the worse for liquor, and from whom, most likely, they would all be able to pick up a trifle by humouring him.

Acting upon this idea, the man who had just been vanquished touched his hat.

"I'll bowl your lordship, if your lordship pleases."

"Done!" hiccuped Dick. "Down with your five shillings, and here's my fifty pounds."

He placed a quantity of uncounted gold upon the table—certainly more than the amount he had named.

"Now, then," he cried, "for the game!"

The preparations were soon made, and Dick allowed to bowl first.

His antagonist was quite willing to make him any such allowance as this, because he felt sure of winning.

Dick poised the bowl with tipsy gravity, and affected to take the most careful aim.

But when the biased ball left his hand, it rolled, as might be expected, very far way indeed from the jack.

His other efforts were no better, and, of course, there was no doubt that he had lost.

But envy would not let the others allow one of their number to profit so largely by what had happened.

Cries of shame were raised; and more than one declared that it was nothing but barefaced robbery to take the gentleman's money.

"It is—it is," said the landlord. "He is not in a state to play—he is not steady enough."

Incautiously, the landlord spoke these words in a tone sufficiently loud to reach Dick Turpin's ears.

He turned round with an angry scowl, and made his way towards him with angry gestures.

"Do you insult me, you d—d tun-belled rascal? I'll—I'll—"

A hickup stopped his further speech; and just at the same moment a cock flew up on to the low wall close by, and, flapping his wings, crowed lustily.

Dick's attention was at once attracted to this new object.

"My hand isn't steady, isn't it?" he muttered. "But you're a liar, Mr. Landlord, and this shall prove it!"

At the same time, and without anyone present having the least notion of what he was about to do, he drew a pistol, and raising it, suddenly pulled the trigger.

So rapidly was all this done that there did not seem to be time for him to take aim; certainly no one was quick enough to prevent him.

There was a loud report, and the cock, who had been so exultant a moment before, fell ignominiously into the dust, with his feathers all dabbled in blood, and in the last agonies of death.

"Who says my hand isn't steady now?" Dick asked, with an air of triumph, as he flung the pistol from him.

"I say you are a d—d fool!" responded the landlord, angrily. "You shall pay dearly for it!"

"What do you say?"

"You have shot my favourite bird!" said the landlord, displaying more violent passion than one would have expected on such an occasion. "There isn't such a game cock in all the ridings of Yorkshire as that! I wouldn't have parted with him for any money!"

Dick regarded him with a stupid, besetted stare.

In the meanwhile, some of the bystanders had picked up the game cock and brought it towards the house.

The sight of the bird thus suddenly and wantonly slaughtered redoubled the landlord's resentment.

Flourishing his clenched fist in Dick's face, he resumed:

"I'll have the law on you for this! It shall be the dearest bit of sport you ever had in the whole course of your life!"

"Get back," said Dick, drawing another pistol—"get back, I say! What do I care? If you will get up on the top of the wall and flap your wings and crow, I'll d—d soon shoot you; and think no more about it than I did about shooting him! Perhaps you'll think twice before you insult a gentleman again."

During this speech his voice grew thicker and thicker.

The last words were all but inarticulate.

A rush of blood seemed to force its way into his head, his eyes clouded, and he sank almost insensible upon the nearest seat.

But the landlord's exasperation was much increased by Dick's threat, more especially as it had been greeted by a general laugh.

"I will have the law on him!" he cried. "Yes will I, even if he was the King of England, and if it cost me all the money I am worth!"

CHAPTER MCXXV.

DICK TURPIN AWAKES TO FIND HIMSELF THE INMATE OF A PRISON CELL.

THE landlord fully meant what he said.

The game cock was the one living thing above all others which he loved and prized the most, and it was more than he could endure to see it thus wantonly slaughtered.

Accordingly, he beckoned one of his servants to him, and despatched him for the police.

A very short time elapsed before he returned, accompanied by several constables and police officers belonging to the City of York; but not any of those under Mr. Skellam's command.

These were, indeed, in quite another part of the country, hunting vainly for traces of the fugitive.

"There he is," said the landlord—"arrest him."

"Why, the gentleman's dead drunk! What's the charge?"

"Threatening my life and shooting my game cock. Take him up, I say!"

One of the officers stepped up to Dick, who was as yet unconscious of their arrival, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You must come with us," he said. "Don't make any fuss."

These words are quite sufficient to show that the officers had not the remotest suspicion of Dick's identity.

By this time the poor fugitive had all but succumbed to the subtle influence of the drug.

He started upon feeling a hand laid upon him, and looked up vacantly.

Yet, stupefied as he was, he comprehended that it was an officer standing in such close proximity to him.

With a loud cry thrilling from his lips, he started to his feet.

The sight of his foes galvanised him into life.

As sometimes a sudden shock will almost sober a drunken man, so did the knowledge of the fearful peril in which he stood enable the fugitive to triumph over the insidious power of the drug.

In another moment a most violent struggle commenced.

The first officer received a terrific blow upon the head with the butt end of Dick's pistol, which laid him flat as suddenly as if he had been struck down with a pole-axe.

Upon seeing this attack, the others quickly closed round him, calling in a loud voice upon those standing by to render their assistance.

The struggle was terrific.

Despite the number of his foes, Dick managed to draw his sword; and no doubt many would have suffered severely had it not been wrenched from his hand by one who was bolder and stronger than the rest.

Dick's strength, too, was beginning to fail him.

His blood was too much loaded by the drug for him to be able very long to retain the mastery over it.

Besides, it was not possible for anyone to fight successfully against such odds as were opposed to him.

They hemmed him round.

Many hands seized him.

The landlord clutched him by the throat.

Another officer managed to secure a rope round one of his arms.

It was at this moment that a horseman, mounted on a steed of jetty blackness, was riding along the high-road before the inn.

It was now almost dark—at least, distant objects looked obscure and dim.

Seeing the contention that was going on, this stranger, animated apparently by curiosity, rode up to see what was the cause of it.

When he saw so many attacking one who seemed to be helplessly drunk, he was about to interfere.

But just as he uttered the first words of angry indignation, Dick relapsed into total insensibility, and would have fallen backwards to the ground had he not been held up by those officers who stood behind him.

He was now securely pinioned by the rope, and even now the officers failed to recognise him.

Indeed, that Dick Turpin should be reduced to this condition was so unlikely a circumstance that it never once occurred to them.

But the stranger who had just arrived looked somewhat curiously upon the bruised and dust-covered figure of the fugitive.

"Who is it?" he asked; and as the tumult had somewhat subsided his question was attended to.

The landlord—who was one of those who always had an eye to business, and fancied he saw in the new-comer a customer—said, respectfully:

"It's a gentleman a little overcome, sir—that's it, and, as you see, uncommon violent."

The police officers looked upon the stranger, and immediately began to whisper to each other.

"That's Captain Hawk!" cried one. "Seize him—seize him!"

But Captain Hawk—for it was indeed no other—merely tightened the rein a little, and his magnificent steed rose upon his hind legs, and pawed the air with its fore eyes in such a way as to make it particularly unsafe for anyone to approach too near.

"Good evening, gentlemen all!" he said, with an ironical bow. "If you are inclined to exercise the muscles of your legs a little you have an excellent opportunity, for I am off! Good night!"

"Ten thousand curses on the fellow's impudence!" said one of the officers, as Captain Hawk galloped off. "That's just about like him." But he will come if too strong one of these days. I know he will, and then it will be all up with him."

The officers were wise enough to see that it would be quite labour in vain for them to attempt to pursue a mounted man, so they did not offer to stir, but turned

the whole of their attention to the capture they had just made.

Captain Hawk was quickly lost to view in the darkness.

It may seem strange that he should not recognise the prisoner; but it is quite certain that he did not.

And could a tolerably good idea be formed of the dejected, wasted, bruised, and bleeding object which Dick was at that moment, the circumstance would by no means have been wondered at.

It was also too dark for anything to be seen with due distinctness.

From a combination of all these causes, then, it happened that Captain Hawk passed by his friend and left him at a moment when he could have been of the utmost service to him.

Yet so it was, and Dick was left absolutely at the mercy of his foes.

The officers were in no hurry to remove him; and, having satisfied themselves that he was secure, they laid him at full length on one of the tables, and proceeded to regale themselves at the expense of the landlord, from whose lips they received a full account of what had taken place.

"You are sure he's a gentleman?" remarked one of the officers, interrogatively.

"Quite sure of it. He has no end of money upon him, and he threw it about just like dirt."

"Then he may think himself lucky, for if he wasn't I can tell you this would turn out a very bad evening's sport for him."

At length, a cart having been procured, Dick, still as insensible as at first, was placed in it, and, at a leisurely pace, made their way towards the castle, used then, as now, as a prison for all kinds of criminals.

On their arrival, the landlord of the public-house specified his charge against the prisoner, swearing that he had threatened to take his life.

The officers also deposed to the manner, in which he had resisted the execution of their duty.

His name no one knew.

Dick was still senseless.

His pockets were examined; but, of course, nothing was found that gave the least clue to his identity.

The amount of money found upon his person gave colour to the landlord's statement that he was a gentleman; but the largeness of the sum caused just a little suspicion.

Being looked upon also as a more than usually desperate character, he was carried into one of the strongest cells, and there left to come to himself as best he might.

And this was the strange manner in which Dick Turpin at last had fallen into the hands of his foes.

Of what avail were those often-made protestations that he would never surrender alive?

And yet there he was, lying in a cell perfectly helpless.

It is true he was not known, but after what had taken place the probability was slight that he would for very long remain unrecognised.

From what has been related, the reader will be able to estimate tolerably well the strength of the drug the treacherous ostler had administered.

Had Dick drank off the whole of the glass of brandy the probability is that he would have fallen senseless as soon as he had swallowed the last drop.

He was quite unconscious—quite dead to all around him—quite ignorant of where he was.

And so he remained through the long hours of the tedious night, until the first glimmer of light found its way into his dungeon.

Then he stirred slightly.

But he did not thoroughly wake up for some moments after.

There was an awful sensation in his brain as though it was splitting in two pieces.

His eyes were so heavy that he could scarcely raise the lids, and, feeble as the light was which found its way into that place, yet some time elapsed before he could bear it.

"There am I?" he murmured, at last as something like returning recollection came over him. "What happened last? Why," he added, almost with a shriek, as he started up and glared around him, "this is my dream again!"

a frightful sensation of weakness and sickness at this moment assailed him, and, striving madly to clutch the air and save himself, he fell heavily to the ground.

Here he remained for some time—until, indeed, recollection came back to him.

One point was very clear.

That was that he had swallowed a quantity of drugged brandy, and that he had discovered it just in time to punish the ostler for his treachery.

After that all was blurred and indistinct, nor could he, with all his efforts, call up a remembrance of after events.

With respect to his arrival at the roadside inn, and all that had occurred there, his memory was a perfect blank.

After this he awoke.

He was not quite satisfied whether all this was or was not a dream.

"I had a vision like this once before," he said—"when I awoke from my slumber in the loft. Is this a repetition of it or is it the reality?"

There was little likelihood that he would remain very long in doubt upon this point.

Struggling to his feet, he managed to cross the narrow flooring of his cell.

One touch of the cold stone sufficed.

He was satisfied that he was the inmate of a dungeon.

To describe the effect which this discovery had upon him is simply an impossibility.

He was stunned—overwhelmed.

A slight wound causes much pain—a deadly one causes insensibility.

So it was with the effect which this terrible discovery had upon Dick Turpin.

"I was warned of this," he murmured; "but the warning came too late. This is just as I dreamt, and I feel now just those sensations which were presented to me with such horrible distinctness in my vision. To think that it should come to this at last! I, who have so often sworn that I would never yield myself with life—yet here I wake up and find myself the inmate of a prison cell!"

Dick was so dismayed and daunted upon coming to a full realisation of his position that he could think of doing nothing.

Of one important circumstance he yet remained in ignorance.

This was, that his captors were unaware of his identity.

This was a most vital thing, and, could he but have known it, would have produced no slight amount of contentment.

It chanced, however, that he came once very near to guessing it.

He all at once made the discovery that his limbs were entirely free.

This amazed him not a little, as he naturally enough expected that the first step taken would be to load him with the heaviest irons.

Why they had omitted this precaution puzzled him to think.

The true solution never once occurred to him.

It was while in this state of indecision and uncertainty that the cell door was opened.

And now Dick observed another singularity.

This was, that the jailer had a broad grin upon his face, which looked anything but stern in its expression.

The fact was, this man felt quite sure that Dick must be a real gentleman, the grounds for his belief being the amount of valuables which had been found about him.

Not being a poor man, then, this turnkey was well enough acquainted with the mysteries of prison-keeping to be aware that the proceedings of the preceding evening would be looked upon as a mere drunken frolic—such a one as it would be a world of pities if a gentleman could not have if he thought proper.

Experience had taught the jailer that there was nothing lost by being civil in such cases.

His behaviour, then, might well strike Dick with astonishment, who found himself wholly unable to account for it.

"Good morning, sir, saving your presence," he said, with an awkward attempt to be respectful. "If you

would like anything particular for breakfast, it can always be had in the prison by paying for it."

Dick pressed his hot hands upon his burning, throbbing forehead.

"Head very bad, sir?" the man said, sympathisingly. "I can get you something that will do you a power of good."

"Do so—do so, and I—"

Dick thrust his hands into his pockets, and in no little consternation at finding them empty.

"Never mind the money—that will be all right; I will be back in a jiffy."

The turnkey retired, and Dick sank down upon the stone bench, feeling as though he could not possibly endure the distracting agony in his brain.

It seemed to have been increased a thousandfold by what had just taken place.

Luckily, the man was not long.

On his return he presented Dick with some foaming beverage, which he drank off at a draught without knowing what it was, and almost without tasting it.

"You'll be better now, sir," said the man, with the same deep respect; "you won't be taken before the magistrate for at least an hour, and by that time you will be pretty right. Don't mind it, sir, you will have to pay a fine—but that won't hurt you—perhaps bind you over to keep the peace—that's a mere trifle; and when it's all over just be good enough to remember me, sir—I have tried to make matters as pleasant as I could."

Dick could only reply to this by a long stare of astonishment, which, under any other circumstances, would have been truly comical.

Ah, sir! I fancy you don't recollect anything about it. Well, so much the better. You will get off all the easier before the beak."

Dick was never more amazed.

Over and over again he asked himself whether he could be awake.

"Surely—surely," he thought, "I must be the sport of the vagaries of some wild dream—all this which seems so actual must be unreal."

"I'll tell you, if you like, what I heard," said the jailer, only too anxious to render a service in any way he could think of.

"What—what?" asked Dick, feverishly. "I am distracted! Tell me—tell me all."

Thereupon the jailer, keeping tolerably well to facts, gave a minute and circumstantial account of what had taken place.

Yet, although his account was such a full one, Dick was not able to comprehend his position properly for some time.

But eventually it dawned upon him that, impossible as it seemed, he had been arrested without those who took him prisoner guessing he was other than an intoxicated person.

Even with the help of the turnkey's narration, he was not able to recollect even one of the events stated to have taken place at the inn.

"I must have been under the influence of that maddening drug," he said, as soon as he was alone; "and it is the accursed stuff which is now causing me all this torment. The rascal who caused all this has met with his deserts, though that does not content me."

Dick Turpin ceased, for the wild and, as it seemed, well-nigh impossible idea seized upon him that he might be able to conceal his identity when examined before the magistrate.

If so, as the jailer had stated, he would escape by the payment of a fine, and he knew himself to be possessed of such an amount as made that a matter of small moment.

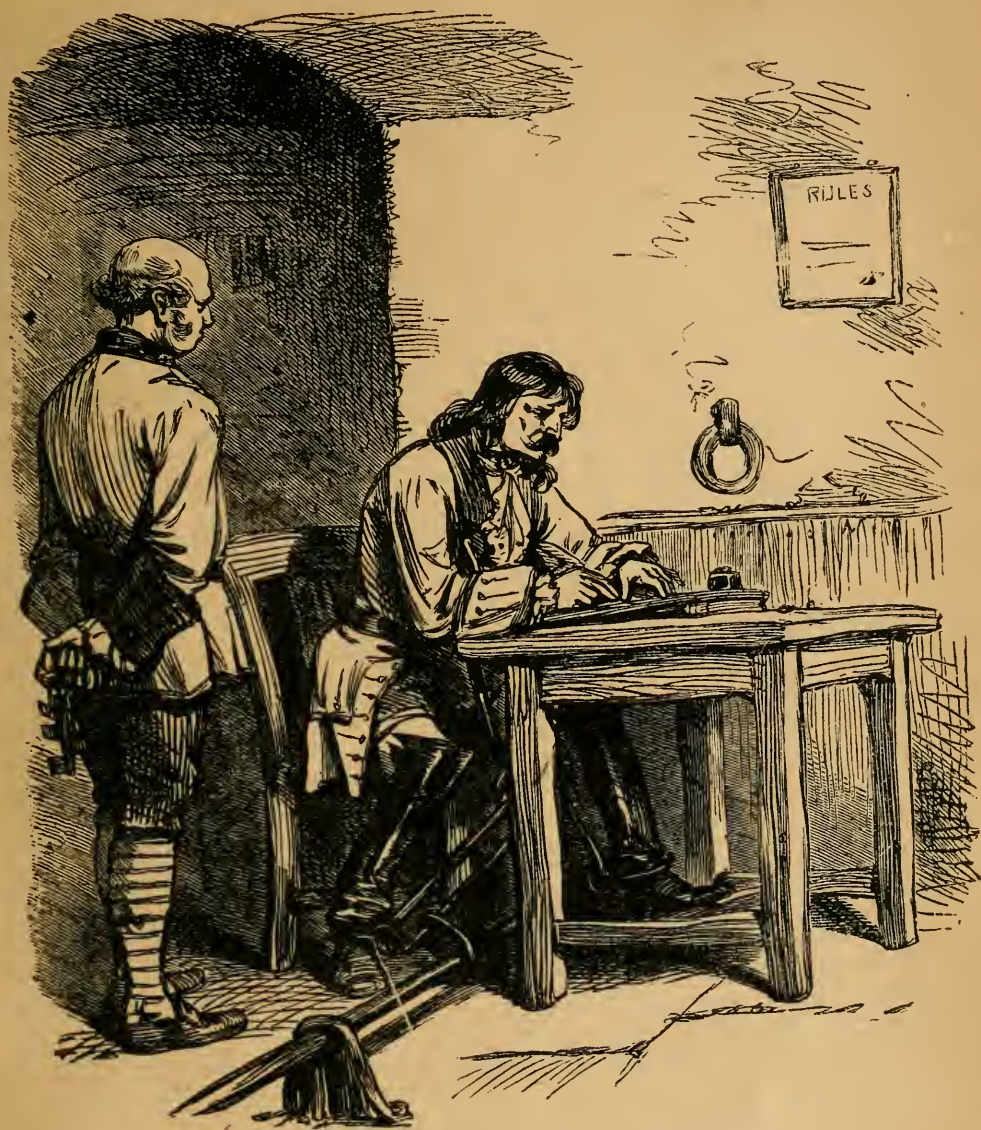
His heart beat wildly at this supposition, and his hopes increased in proportion to his former despair upon awakening and finding himself a captive.

The one person he had to dread was Skellum.

Should that persevering hunter of highwaymen chance to be in the Court, detection would be imminent.

It was quite likely he would be elsewhere, unless he had already received some inkling as to who the prisoner was.

Perplexed by these and kindred doubts and fears, Dick passed the time until he was aroused by the opening of the cell door.



[DICK TURPIN WRITES A LETTER TO HIS BROTHER.]

This was to summon him to appear at the Court. "Say you know nothing about it," whispered the friendly but interested turnkey. "Be civil and sorry, and say how much you regret having swallowed so much wine."

On entering the Court, Dick glanced around him with an anxiety that he strove vainly to conceal.

So few persons were present, however, that he was able to satisfy himself that the much-dreaded Skellum was not visible.

Nor was his rapid gaze arrested by any familiar face.

Dick's name was asked, and after a momentary hesitation, he answered:

"John Palmer."

Some doubt may perhaps have been entertained as to whether this was his real name or an *alias*.

But if so, most assuredly no one guessed him to be the No. 251.—BLACK BESS.

notorious highwayman Dick Turpin, whose exploits formed the theme of every tongue.

But it must be borne in mind that Dick himself had been seen very little in York, and the printed descriptions which had been circulated corresponded very slightly with his present condition.

This will be best understood by remembering that the alteration was so great as to prevent Captain Hawk from recognising him.

The charge was read over by the clerk, and listened to by Dick with an all-absorbing interest.

It needed all his self-command to retain the mastery over his features, but he succeeded admirably.

The charge, divested of all the legal jargon with which it was enveloped, was simply that of wilfully shooting a valuable bird—to wit, a game cock—and making use of such threats against the prosecutor as to put him in fear of his life.

Bearing in mind the promptings of the turnkey, Dick pleaded the influence of the excess of wine he had swallowed, and solemnly declared that he was profoundly ignorant of all the circumstances, and could not call one to his remembrance—that, however, no one was more sorry or regretted what had happened than himself, and protested that the threat was an unmeaning one.

The magistrate felt disposed to take a lenient view of the case.

He assessed the value of the game cock at ten pounds, which Dick was to pay, together with all costs and charges. A fine of five pounds was also levied for the attack upon the officers who arrested him; and, finally, he was to be bound over to keep the peace towards the prosecutor—himself in fifty pounds, and some one else in another fifty.

But for this last most unfortunate occurrence all would have gone well with Dick.

There was not as yet the faintest suspicion concerning him.

Where was Dick to find anyone who would be surety for him?

The thing was impossible.

He asked to be bound in himself for the full amount, offering to pay the whole into the Court; but this was refused, and, as he was not able to name any person, he was removed to his cell once more.

Dick's vexation was intense—indeed, vexation is much too weak a term to express the condition of his mind.

Every moment of delay was fraught with danger to him.

To be compelled to remain in the prison until he found some one to be bound for him seemed equivalent to sentencing him to a life-long imprisonment.

But the turnkey gave Dick a hint.

"It's disagreeable, I know," he said, "to have to call upon any of your friends in such a matter, but you must positively fix upon some one to get you out of the scrape. Surely you must know some one who would do you this service?"

It was while the man was speaking these words that Dick remembered that he had a brother—at least, he believed he had, for a great many years had elapsed since he had either seen or heard from him.

Whether he would render him this service or not he could not tell, but his only chance lay in trying it.

"I will write to one friend," he said, at length. "Let me have the necessary materials. Here, take this. Rely upon it, I shall not forget to be grateful."

Dick had claimed a portion of his money, and he now slipped a couple of guineas into the man's hand.

"All right, sir," he said—"I will bring pens, ink, and paper at once."

He did so, and Dick sat down to commence.

But when about to put pen to paper such a crowd of recollections of his early days came thronging upon him that he was compelled to pause.

Memory carried him back to the time—and yet it was not to such a very distant period after all—when his hands had been altogether free from the stains of guilt.

When he remembered where he then was, and in what peril he stood of passing out of this world ignominiously, his feelings overwhelmed him, and for a time he was obliged to relinquish his task.

"Brother George," he murmured, at length, "I have had but few favours from your hands; but I cannot bring myself to believe that you will be so hard-hearted as to refuse me this—now, when you find that my life is at stake, and that a little trouble on your part will save it, I am certain you will not refuse. At any rate, I will try."

Dick then began his letter.

There was not much in it, but the few words were to the point.

He told his brother of his arrest, and the circumstances which had led to it.

He told him, too, that there was not the slightest suspicion among the authorities as to who he was, and that the finding of a surety would suffice to throw open the prison doors and make him a free man.

After that, he said, there would be no difficulty in doing what he had long decided upon, viz. to quit England never to return to it again.

He concluded the letter by an earnest entreaty to his brother not to desert him in this the hour of extreme need.

Having sealed it, he called in the turnkey, and delivered the missive into his hands.

"Pay for the postage," said Dick, "so that there may be no delay. Here is a crown-piece; keep the change for yourself."

In a former chapter we have mentioned the disastrous consequences which followed the dispatch of this letter.

In the first place, the turnkey was not faithful to his trust.

In those days postage was a very different matter to what it is at present—being, in fact, about twenty times the amount.

The turnkey thought he might as well appropriate this trifle as not, and so the letter was posted unrepaid.

How slight and trivial a circumstance, and yet, beyond all question, it sealed Dick's fate.

The letter, on its arrival, was refused by his brother, on account of the sum demanded for the postage.

Unluckily, it happened that he had been hoaxed not long before and made to pay what was to him a serious sum for what he expected to be a letter, but which was nothing more than a piece of blank paper.

The postmark "York" showed him it was from a place where, to the best of his knowledge, he had no friends or relatives, and—though half unwillingly—he refused the missive.

He had been laughed at on the former occasion, and resolved not to be laughed at again.

That was Dick's death-warrant.

The letter was forwarded to the proper authorities in London.

By them it was opened, and the astounding discovery was made that the notorious Dick Turpin was the writer.

A messenger was despatched forthwith to seek out Skellum, if possible, but, at any rate, to take care that the prisoner was not allowed to get away.

After the letter had been sent Dick suffered a world of anxiety.

Days passed without bringing him any intelligence.

His heart grew sick.

Had there been the least chance of success he would have risked an escape.

But there was none.

It was a matter of great wonder to him that he should have remained so long undiscovered.

On the seventh day after his former examination he was summoned to attend the Court again.

CHAPTER MCXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED BY HIS OLD FOE, MR. SKELLUM.

"HAVE you had no answer?"

Dick had asked the question hundreds of times since he had despatched his letter, and the answer was always the same as that which the turnkey now returned to him.

"Nothing at all, sir. It is very strange, I think."

But on this last occasion the answer affected Dick more than ever.

"Brother George," he murmured, bending his head down sadly, "was it too much to ask you for so little when you knew my life was at stake?"

On reaching the Court he, as before, looked about him anxiously.

But his worst anticipations were relieved.

He saw no one whose countenance he could recognise.

The circumstance that so long a time had elapsed without the prisoner being able to find the requisite security had given birth, naturally enough, to some little suspicion, and he was called up now in order that some questions might be asked of him as to his antecedents.

How much Dick had to dread from any such inquiry as this we need not tell our readers.

But whatever condition his mind might have been in, his countenance remained unruined.

In reply to the interrogations, he only stated that his name was John Palmer, that he was a native of Thaxted, in Essex, where his brother resided, and to whom he had written, but without eliciting a reply.

These answers were taken down for the purpose of having due inquiry made.

It was just as Dick was about to leave the bar that an unusual commotion and disturbance took place at the entrance of the Court.

The blood rushed back to Dick's heart.

Somehow, he felt conscious that he had been discovered.

He was not for long left in doubt upon the point.

Turning his head, he caught sight of the detested, cadaverous form of Skellum.

But surely Skellum was never seen in such a state of excitement as he was then.

That he had been making some very great exertion was manifested, for he was so breathless and trembled so with agitation that he was bereft of speech.

The first words, however, that he gasped out were:

"Seize that man!—hold him fast, everybody!—take every care or he will escape! Hold him—hold him, I say!"

He pointed while he spoke at the prisoner at the bar.

At first, Dick seemed paralysed at finding his old enemy before him—the man to whom most unquestionably the loss of his faithful comrade and the death of Maud were attributable.

Then, with a sudden bound, his heart seemed to prompt him to be revenged.

Before anyone could stay him, he sprang over the front of the dock.

All thought he was about to make a desperate effort to get free, and the consequence was that the Court then presented such a scene of tumult as had never before been witnessed within its walls, and such as beggars all description.

Unfortunately, Dick fell awkwardly upon some benches, the presence of which he was not aware of; and before he could extricate himself he found at least a dozen men piled upon him.

All his struggles were futile.

Even had he been in possession of his full vigour he could scarcely have coped with so many foes.

But now, worn down and enfeebled, he absolutely stood no chance whatever.

Probably no one was more amazed at these proceedings than the magistrate, who, secure on his high seat, was the only passive spectator of the riotous scene.

It was not without great difficulty that Dick was completely overpowered.

The intense longing he had to revenge the deaths of those he held so dear lent him a temporary and fictitious strength.

It did not endure many minutes.

Busy hands manacled his wrists, while others tightly bound his ankles with a cord.

Further struggling was impossible.

Helpless as a log of wood, he was carried into the dock and placed upon a chair, for his exhaustion was now so great as to make standing an impossibility.

After this was done, the magistrate had no little difficulty in quelling the uproar; and as soon as ever anything approaching silence was obtained he settled his spectacles firmly and bent his gaze upon Mr. Skellum.

"Who are you?" he asked, sternly—"what do you mean by—"

"Your worship," interrupted Skellum, speaking rapidly, "you have need to be thankful that I arrived so opportunely. You little guessed what a desperate character stood before you—and, indeed, still stands. That he should not be recognised does not surprise me, for he is indeed strangely—wonderfully altered!"

"But who are you?" bawled the magistrate, dipping his pen very fiercely into the ink while he spoke.

"My name is Antrebus Skellum, and I am acting under the immediate instructions of the Secretary of State."

"Oh!"

From this moment the magistrate altered his demeanour.

"The prisoner before you," Skellum continued, with a vindictive look at Dick—for nothing could be more vexatious to him than finding after all his trouble he was deprived of the satisfaction of apprehending him—"has caused a world of trouble, and is guilty of more crimes than I could recount."

"Who is he?" asked the magistrate.

"Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

Had a cannon been discharged in the Court the effect could scarcely have been greater than this announcement produced.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the magistrate. "Can it be possible?"

"Not only possible, but perfectly true, your worship. That he should be in custody without his identity being suspected is perhaps one of the strangest events in his career."

The magistrate took off his spectacles and looked earnestly at the prisoner.

"You are quite sure of what you say, Mr. —?"

"Quite sure. Here is a letter which he wrote to his brother, asking him to come forward and be his surety for fifty pounds. The postage being unpaid, the letter was refused, and when opened at the Dead Letter Office, the discovery was made that Dick Turpin was the writer—that the man I had been searching for night and day, and straining every nerve to apprehend, was actually safe in prison!"

This was a most aggravating reflection to Skellum—in fact, he could scarcely contain himself.

And his feelings were by no means mollified when he perceived a smile upon the lips of every person in the Court.

"But I am satisfied," he continued, in an acrimonious voice—"quite satisfied at seeing him here a prisoner under any circumstances. I will answer for it he does not escape."

"What evidence do you intend to bring forward?" asked the magistrate.

"I imagine that these letters and my own oath as to his identity will be sufficient to warrant you in remanding him for a day or two."

"Oh, certainly!"

Mr. Skellum then swore very positively to the identity of the prisoner, who was then, under an unusually strong escort, removed to the strongest cell in the whole of York Castle.

The intelligence of the remarkable events which had occurred in the Court very quickly spread themselves over the whole of the city, causing an amount of popular excitement which, till then, had been unexampled.

Dick's first impulse upon finding himself alone in his cell was to give full vent to his despair.

"It is fate," he cried—"it is my fate! All proves it. Every effort I have made to get away from this accursed place has been a futile one—some strange circumstance has ever guided my footsteps back again to it. I am here, and I am doomed!"

But Dick Turpin was never one to abandon himself very long to despair.

On the present occasion he recovered much sooner than might have been expected.

"I know the worst now," he muttered. "Before this, I felt so undecided that I knew not how to act. Now there admits no doubt—I have but one course to follow; I will try it—I will strive my best, for if I fail I shall lose nothing."

Dick resolved upon his escape.

He was animated solely by that strong desire which had of late been so much before him.

But for his hope and confidence of being able to regain the spot where Maud lay so peacefully, he would have resigned himself entirely to his fate.

It is questionable, however, whether the hope of freedom would have presented itself under such circumstances to anyone save Dick Turpin.

After all that trouble the authorities had had, and with the existence of such a personal feeling as filled Skellum's breast, it was only reasonable to suppose that no precaution would be spared to keep him secure.

Indeed, to have permitted him to get free would have been a great scandal to everybody connected with the affair. Yet, although not unmoved by these considerations, Dick never wavered in his resolve.

He would be free or die in the attempt.

And as to the latter, he would sooner perish so than fall into the hands of the hangman, as he would do inevitably if he remained.

One discovery, however, he was not long making which threatened to be a great impediment to his projected escape.

This was that his weakness was so great that he could scarcely move.

Such a thing as this might well have cast him into despair.

But it did not.

"Let me think," he muttered. "Some time must elapse before—before my trial—say my trial."

The word which had first risen to his lips was "execution," but he could not bring himself to pronounce that word.

"Between now and then, if I take proper measures, surely it will be easy enough for me to recover at least a considerable portion of my expended strength. Yes, yes—I will turn the whole of my attention to doing this, and, moreover, I shall have plenty of time to think over and mature my plans."

There was another thought which struck him too, and which went far towards convincing him that this enforced delay was also most vital to success.

It was only reasonable to think that a much closer and vigilant watch would be kept at first than there would be when they had found, after several nights, their watching was of no avail.

"Yes," he said, "there can be no room for doubt upon the point. I will feign that I am so impressed with the idea that my fate is inevitable that I shall make no effort. I can do that easily; I will throw them quite off their guard."

After the discovery of his identity, Dick had been removed to another and stronger part of the castle, so that for this reason he saw no more of the turnkey who had so thoughtlessly precipitated his recognition.

But he found no difficulty in obtaining a further supply of the money which had been taken from him on his first arrival at the castle, for, as is well known, the usages of prisons in this respect were widely different to what they are at the present day.

At the time of which we write, if a prisoner happened to possess a tolerably good store of cash, confinement in his cell was about the only discomfort he had to endure, and even this was made as light as possible.

Scarcely any restriction was made as to the kinds of provisions and drink that were carried in, and Dick availed himself of this state of things to have brought to him every nourishing kind of food and wine he could think of.

He had to pay for them most extravagantly, it is true, but then he did not care for that—nothing could have caused him less consideration.

He was pleased to find that he was gaining flesh and strength daily in the most surprising manner.

Indeed, when he was had up for his next examination he presented something like his former aspect.

He had not troubled himself to inquire the precise nature of the charge that was to be brought forward against him on this occasion.

Nor had he thought it worth while to engage any legal assistance.

The money paid to any lawyer would have been simply thrown away, for no man, though never so eloquent, could have brought the trial to end in the least degree to his advantage.

All that was gone through was a form merely.

Yet, when the details were made known to him, he could not help feeling some degree of surprise.

"Your worship," said the counsel for the prosecution, "the charge I am about to bring before the prisoner is of the most serious nature known—it is that of murder!"

Dick listened eagerly, for at present he could not think of what was coming.

"I fixed upon this charge," continued the counsel, "because if proved—and no evidence can be clearer than that which I possess—it will be sufficient to warrant the passing of sentence of death, and because it is one of the last of the long list of crimes the prisoner has committed."

Even after this preface it did not strike Dick what was coming.

"It appears that only so lately as the 18th inst. the prisoner was in the environs of York. Stopping at a small public-house, he, with many threats and curses, bade the ostler place a horse at his service, and offering a very considerable sum in return if he would do so. This the honest fellow very properly refused to do, whereupon the prisoner, with a loud oath, whipped out his sword and

wounded the ostler therewith so grievously that in a short time he died from the effects.

"But not without leaving some testamentary evidence behind.

"Most fortunately the poor fellow survived long enough to serve the ends of justice. Here is his statement of what took place, written down from his lips, and attested by reliable evidence."

The document in question was handed to the magistrate.

Glancing over it, his eyes rested upon the signatures.

"Call John Timmis," he said, in a loud voice.

A portly, jovial-looking man responded to the summons.

He was placed in the witness-box at once.

The magistrate read over the document, which was to the effect of what we have just stated.

"Is that correct?" he asked.

"Every word of it, your worship."

"How did you discover what had happened?"

"We heard a most awful groaning, your worship; and on going to see what was the cause of it, we saw the ostler lying on his back in the stable weltering in his blood."

"Very good. And after he had made this statement, what did he do?"

"Went dead, your worship."

It is not our purpose, however, to enter minutely into the proceedings which took place on this occasion.

The officers who had chased him over the house-tops were examined.

To them Dick's disappearance was as great a mystery as ever.

Then others were produced who testified to having seen Dick walking away from the scene of the murder on the evening in question, and not long after the hour when it must have been committed.

Then Skellum came forward, and swore most positively that the prisoner at the bar was no other than the world-renowned highwayman, Dick Turpin.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the magistrate, "what have you to say?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

After this Dick Turpin was duly committed to take his trial at the next York assizes, on the charge of wilful murder.

The magistrate thought fit to caution the Governor of the prison to take every possible precaution to prevent the escape of the daring offender he had entrusted to his custody.

Dick merely bowed as he left the Court.

"He seems remarkably quiet," said the magistrate to Skellum, in a confidential whisper. "I thought he was such a desperate character."

"So he is."

"How do you account for his present behaviour?"

"I cannot account for it, your worship," was Skellum's reply; "but feeling convinced that it means something, I shall keep a doubly sharp look-out."

"Are you sure you have got the right man?"

"As sure as I am of my own identity."

"That is sufficient, then."

Outside the Court nothing was talked of but the particulars of Dick's extraordinary arrest; but, strangely enough, it happened that Captain Hawk was the last to hear anything about it.

CHAPTER MCXXXVII

DICK TURPIN HAS A MOST UNEXPECTED YET MOST WELCOME VISITOR.

FROM the day when the good old castle of York had first been put to the base uses of a prison never had there been so much excitement in and around its walls as there was when they had Dick Turpin for a prisoner.

Double guards were placed in all the corridors, and received at frequent intervals, while many men were set to patrol the outward walls.

Of all this Skellum was the presiding genius—he was indefatigable.

But this will seem by no means wonderful when it is remembered how much he had at stake.

Dick still preserved that calm, apathetic behaviour which had so surprised the magistrate and caused Mr. Skellum to be more suspicious than ever.

But the prisoner's composure was severely tried by the number of visitors who crowded the cell for the purpose of visiting him.

Of these, nearly all were perfect strangers, brought solely by a contemptible curiosity.

There was not one of them who would have aided him in any way, yet they would stand gaping at him and endeavouring to enter into conversation with him in a manner that would lead one to suppose that they were deeply interested in his fate.

It was in vain that Dick protested against this.

No regard was paid to his complaints.

He was looked upon more in the light of a wild beast than an ordinary mortal, and therefore it was no more than right that he should be gazed at.

But among the rest came the warm-hearted baronet, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

Dick's face lighted up with pleasure as soon as he beheld him, for he knew his motive to be a better one than mere curiosity.

"I am truly sorry to see you here," were Sir Humphrey's first words. "When I heard you had tricked the officers at the lawyer's, I was in the hopes that you would get clear away."

"And unquestionably I should have succeeded in doing this had it not been for the basest treachery," said Dick, with a bitterness which he could not suppress. "But, there," he added, "it's no good grieving over the past."

"Not a bit of it—not a bit of it. I am glad you think so. What brings me here, however, is to know what I can do in your behalf."

"You are too generous, and I—"

"Pooh, pooh!—nothing of the sort. If what you have done for me does not deserve a return, I should like to know what does. Don't be afraid to speak, but just say what I can do for you."

"I am afraid nothing, though I thank you just the same."

"But I insist upon doing something, if it is ever so little; I shan't rest if I don't do something."

"I wish I knew some way in which you could aid me," answered Dick; "but I do not. I am here, and I know my position well enough to feel certain that the authorities will only allow me to leave here when on my way to the scaffold."

"Pooh, pooh, I say! You don't know what can be done in England when money is in the case, and I shan't be inclined to spare a few pounds, I assure you."

"And yet, Sir Humphrey, I trust you will forgive me for saying that I am afraid money will be but of slight importance in my case."

"I shall not allow you to be a judge, and that puts into my head what will be the best thing I can do for you. It is to send the lawyers to you; they will know best what can be done."

This offer Dick could not reject.

He had but little hope that it would eventuate to his benefit, but for all that he thanked Sir Humphrey warmly, because he knew how well-intentioned the offer was.

"Put every trust in Steel," he said, when about to depart. "He is a wonderfully clever fellow; and if anybody can do the least good he can."

Again expressing his thanks as well as he was able—for true gratitude is ever poor in thanks—Dick Turpin bade the eccentric baronet farewell.

But another visitor came that same day, whose presence was, if anything, more pleasing to Dick than the baronet's had been, and that is saying a great deal.

Just when the cell was beginning to grow dusky and obscure from the decline of daylight, the cell door was opened, and a form which Turpin at first did not recognise crossed the threshold.

This was a young man of very juvenile appearance—but this was principally owing to the fact that there was only just the faintest possible moustache visible on his upper lip.

His cheeks and chin were as smooth and velvety as those of a woman.

His hands, too, were white, small and delicate—of a very feminine appearance.

He was attired in the very extreme of the then pre-

vailing fashion—in fact, a dandified-looking individual of the Beau Brummel type.

In one hand he carried a perfume-box with a perforated lid, which he applied to his nose continually.

"Disgusting odour!" he exclaimed, advancing with the final step of a dancing master. "Odious—odious! Where's Dick Turpin? Hi! you key-carrier—which is Dick Turpin? Ah!"

Having concluded this brilliant speech, he took a particularly long sniff at his perfume-box.

The turnkey manifested the utmost respect and deference towards this foppish individual, though he had to draw the back of his hand across his lips to conceal the grin which appeared there.

From his manner, however, it was clear that the fresh visitor had behaved liberally to him.

"There he is, if you please, sir," the turnkey answered. "He is quite harmless. You can go as close as you like to him without danger—he is securely chained."

"Ah! is it so? Positively—demme!"

He screwed his eye-glass into his eye as he spoke, and stared for some moments in silence.

There was an angry glare visible in Dick's eyes.

This young fellow's manner was, as may be supposed, most offensive to him.

"Monstrous—monstrous strange!" he ejaculated, dropping his eye-glass and again having recourse to his pounce-box. "A curiosity—a wonder! Ah! demme!"

Another long stare followed.

Then turning to the jailer, he said:

"Here, you key-carrier, take this—it's a guinea. Get something to drink outside—I want to talk a little with this Turpin. Ah! I profess he's a curiosity—yes, a monstrous curiosity! Ah, ah!"

The turnkey took the coin slipped into his hand, and withdrew without a word, closing the door after him.

No sooner had he retired than a remarkable alteration took place in the manner of this very affected creature.

With a sudden stride that was surprisingly at variance with his former movements, he placed himself quite close to the prisoner and held out his hand.

"Why, Dick, my friend," he said, in a suppressed voice, and with such a striking difference in its tones—as it possible that my disguise is so good as to prevent you from recognising me? or is it the darkness of this detestable place? I—"

"Beg, pardon, sir," said the turnkey, opening the door with such suddenness as to cause the visitor to start and appear in no slight degree disconcerted; "I forgot to say that when you wanted to leave all you have to do is to tap against the door here. I shall hear you."

"Very well, key-carrier—very well," replied the stranger, only partially succeeding in his attempt to resume his former voice and manner.

The turnkey, however, seemed to suspect nothing, for he withdrew again without uttering another syllable.

"Confound the fellow!" said the stranger, speaking in what we may suppose to be his natural voice; "he scared me for the moment."

Dick looked puzzled for a moment.

"My disguise is good," said the stranger. "But look; surely you will recognise me now."

He stood so that what light struggled through the window of the cell fell upon his face.

"Captain Hawk!" ejaculated Dick.

"Hush—hush; not so loud! That confounded fellow might have ears long enough to hear what you say, and that would be decidedly unpleasant."

"This is indeed a pleasure and a satisfaction!" Dick cried, with sparkling eyes, and clasping the young man's outstretched hand. "But why are you here?"

"To see you."

"Is that all?"

"All, do you call it? Is it not more than enough? I look upon it as a slight favour to show to one whom I like to consider a comrade and a friend."

"You are very generous."

"Not a bit of it. I have come here to see you and to serve you, Dick; and as I have done the one, so will I accomplish the other."

There could be no mistaking the tone of resolution in which the captain spoke.

His manner was that of a man who is determined

effect some object, no matter what obstacles or difficulties stand in the way.

The way in which he spoke had a great effect upon Dick Turpin.

He had a high opinion of the captain.

He knew him to be one to rush on where all others would shrink back or pause, and Dick had found by experience how often this line of action ensures success in any desperate undertaking.

And what could be too desperate for Captain Hawk?

"I am truly sorry to see you here, Dick," he said; "but there is one comfort even in that."

"How so?"

"We know the worst."

Dick smiled.

"You shall be free."

"I hope so."

"I say it, and mean it. You shall be free, if you have to step over my dead body to make your escape!"

Oh, how grateful it was to Dick to find such a friend as this so unexpectedly, and after what had so lately taken place!

His emotions overcame him to such an extent, that speech was impossible.

But Captain Hawk went on speaking with the same energy and rapidity of utterance as before.

"I hold it as a point of the nicest honour to set you free; so rest-assured I shall not fail, for I consider I am to a great extent the cause of your being here now—I am more than anybody else to blame for it, and to my last day I shall never cease to regret the circumstance."

These words were in the highest degree enigmatical to Dick.

He looked up with an air of puzzled wonder.

"You to blame!" he murmured. "I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Neither more nor less than I say."

"But explain."

"Why, when you were struggling with the police before your capture, I was close at hand—I rode up just as you were overpowered."

"You did?" ejaculated Dick, in the utmost astonishment.

"I did. And I know you want to ask the question why it was I did not at the least make some attempt to save you."

"Nay, I—"

"But I know you do; and what is more, I know that is what I ought to have done. But incredible as it may seem to you, though I saw you with tolerable plainness, I did not recognise you."

"Not recognise me!" echoed Dick, in a way which showed how much this had surprised him.

"No, I positively did not; and if you could only contrive to form some idea of how you looked on that occasion, your astonishment would cease. You were bruised and bleeding, your apparel was covered with dust, and such a change had been wrought in your features that they were perfectly strange to me."

"It must have been so," responded Dick, somewhat sadly, "otherwise the officers would have known me."

"True."

"And were not you recognised?"

"Well, I was; and, to tell the truth, I was not prepared for the event, and was thrown for a moment off my guard. My immediate impulse, without the least reflection, mind you, was to touch Satan a little, and then the next thing I knew anything about was that we were flying over the open country like the wind."

Dick sighed heavily, for these words reminded him forcibly of his great and irreparable loss.

Captain Hawk did not fail to perceive the effect his words had had, and, with a right instinct, he forebore from asking any questions about Black Bess—a thing he was most anxious to do.

"What causes me the most remorse," he went on, "is the conviction I feel that I could, had I but known, have rescued you from your captors; and that is why I so blame myself, and why I consider I am the cause of your being here."

"But it is wrong on your part to think so."

"Don't try to persuade me of that; it would be a hopeless task, I assure you. I do blame myself, and I am resolved to make what reparation I am able. You shall

be free, Dick, and by my agency, even if I have to pull down every stone of York Castle to accomplish it."

Dick smiled at the enthusiasm he manifested.

"Wait a moment," he said; "you must explain your presence here. It is a perfect mystery how you contrived to gain admittance."

"Nothing could be more simple."

"How so?"

"You see this disguise? I play my part tolerably well, do I not?"

"Exceedingly well."

"Such a character is easy enough to play, and that is why I selected it. When my make-up was perfect, I called upon Sir Humphrey Yeomans, and after a little difficulty, got him to write an order for my admittance."

"But you expose yourself to great danger by coming here."

"Not a bit of it. The police are such dunder-headed fellows that you have only got to travel a little out of the beaten track and they are puzzled completely. But never mind that—let us come back to the matter in hand."

"My escape?"

"Just so."

"A very close watch is being kept round the prison, is there not?"

"Yes, very, and I am glad to see it."

"Glad to see it?"

"Yes; the very superfluity of precaution will undo itself. In a night or so, if all is kept quiet, they will grow as careless as possible. These violent measures never last."

"I believe you are right," answered Dick, speaking in a tone of voice which showed that Captain Hawk's words had produced a marked effect upon his spirits.

"Of course I am right; and only consider how easy it would have been for me to supply you with a fool or two on this present visit. But it is not worth while to regret that; we have time enough before us. There is, however, one very important thing."

"What is it?"

"Why, that you try your best to recover your customary strength."

"Rely upon it, I shall do so."

"That is right, then. The rest leave to me; I will take care in a short time to supply you with all things necessary for a successful escape, as well as give you all possible information."

"You are indeed a true friend," exclaimed Dick, enthusiastically, and grasping the young man's hand while he spoke. "Until you came my heart was sad and heavy, for I believed I had no friend; now, however, I feel relieved of a heavier load than I can possibly describe."

"Believe me, I rejoice to hear it; and when your escape has been effected I will aid you to do anything you may decide upon."

Dick was most grateful for this assurance.

Some more conversation passed between them, but it is not necessary to place it before our readers, because it only related to those events that had elapsed, and about which Captain Hawk possessed no very definite information.

"I must put an end to this visit now," he said, at length; "though I am most reluctant to leave you; still, I have stayed long enough already to give rise to suspicion, and it is impossible to be too cautious and too prudent."

Dick could not but admit the force and truth of this, though the prospect of a separation affected him strangely. His feelings can only be understood by those who have been cut off from all communication from their fellow-beings, and whose hearts have yearned for the companionship of some congenial spirit.

Agreeably to the intimation of the turnkey, Captain Hawk tapped upon the panel of the door.

It was opened with so much promptness that he rejoiced to think the whole of the conversation between himself and his friend had been prudently carried on in a low tone.

CHAPTER MXXXVIII.

ALLOWS THE READER TO TAKE A PEEP AT THE REMARKABLE PROCEEDINGS OF CAPTAIN HAWK.

LAUGHING in his sleeve at the short-sightedness of the authorities, Captain Hawk made his way out of the prison unmolested.

The idea never once entered the minds of the men on duty that this superfinical-looking personage was other than he appeared to be.

On emerging into the streets, the captain was surprised to find it was so dark.

In fact, night had fairly set in.

"Let me see," he said, walking with more briskness than was exactly consonant with his assumed character—"I have much to do—very much. It is plain that Dick relies upon me—perhaps the reason is that he has no one else. No matter, I shall succeed; his reliance will not prove to be ill-placed."

When he spoke again an additional seriousness might have been detected in the tones of his voice.

"It is most certain," he said, "that this enterprise cannot be carried on without money, and it is equally certain that I have not enough at the present moment. The conclusion that follows is plain enough: the money must be had, though my intention was to keep myself perfectly quiet; but that is out of the question now."

At this moment he turned a corner, and found himself close to an old inn—probably one of the oldest and most picturesque-looking habitations in the whole City of York.

Some faded gilt letters on a weather-beaten sign-board informed wayfarers that the old inn was known by the sign of The Chequers.

It was evident that the place did not lack custom, for loud sounds of rude and boisterous merriment issued from its many doors and windows.

Captain Hawk gave a hasty glance around him.

It was the first time he had done so since he left the castle, so that for aught he knew he might have been followed the whole of the way.

Nothing was visible, however, that would cause apprehension.

Having satisfied himself that the coast was clear, he somewhat suddenly plunged into the shadow of a wide, dark gateway communicating with the stables.

It was towards the latter that his steps were directed.

His approach was either seen or heard, for a door was opened and an ostler appeared, whose face was beaming all over with a grin of satisfaction.

"My eyes, captain," he ejaculated, with evident satisfaction, "how first-rate you do look, to be sure—captain!"

Captain Hawk neither paused nor spoke until he had crossed the threshold.

Then his first words were:

"Is Satan all right?"

"Never was better, captain—never better, I'll take upon myself to say that; but do tell me, how ever was it that you came to give him such a name?"

"Because he has power over the darkness."

"Now, that's what I call a good answer, captain—the best I have heard for many a day."

The captain did not seem inclined to take the ostler's word, for he penetrated still further into the stables until he reached the stall where his matchless steed was standing.

A low whinnying sound showed that he was recognised, and it was with a thrill of his nerves and a glow of his heart which cannot be described the captain fondly caressed his horse.

"You are in good trim," he said. "It would be almost a pity to let you stand still. Sam!"

"Yes, captain."

"Get Satan ready for me as quickly as you can. I will just go in and make a few necessary changes in my dress."

"It's a pity, captain—a real pity. Those togs suit you exactly."

Hawk smiled, but said nothing.

Emerging from the stable, he crossed the yard and entered the inn by a small door which did not seem to be much used as a means of entrance.

The passage beyond was very dark, but the captain must have been wonderfully well acquainted with it, for he walked on with the utmost confidence.

At the extremity was a door.

Opening this, he passed into a small apartment dimly lighted by a smouldering fire.

A good kick with his foot caused the logs to break into a blaze.

The flickering light which now shot up showed that the room was by no means destitute of comforts.

On the table a light repast was spread, evidently in anticipation of the captain's coming.

The whole had a most tempting look, and as he glanced at the different viands he pronounced the name:

"Jessie!"

By this he most likely meant that he knew to whom he was indebted for this attention; and by the smile on his lips and the sparkle in his eyes, it might be inferred that this mention of her name conjured up most agreeable recollections.

But he was in too much hurry and excitement to do anything like justice to the delicacies laid before him.

A few minutes sufficed to enable him to make the necessary alterations in his costume.

Advancing to the door, he took down a large horseman's cloak that was hanging behind it, and just as he did so a faint tapping sound came from without.

Captain Hawk opened the door in a moment.

A young girl, whose age at the most could not have exceeded seventeen, just crossed the threshold, and stood in an attitude of mingled timidity and grace.

Her large, dark eyes were fixed in a moment upon the captain's face with a glance that was expressive of pleasure and half reproach.

"Shall you go out again to-night?" she asked, in a sweet, musical voice.

"Yes, Jessie; I am off now. In another moment I should have been gone."

"Without a word?"

"You might have been unaware of my brief return. But never mind, my lass; I shall be back in a few hours after midnight."

The young girl sighed faintly, and turned away, perhaps to hide the tears that sprang up to her eyes.

"*Au revoir, Jessie!*" cried the highwayman, with careless gaiety. "Don't be uneasy; I shall soon return."

And with these words on his lips, he flung the cloak over his shoulder, and left the room.

Not once did he glance back, and when he again emerged into the inn yard he was whistling in an undertone a portion of a popular air from the last new opera.

Satan was quite ready.

Seeing the captain approach, the ostler led the horse into the yard.

After a careful inspection of all the trappings, the captain vaulted into the saddle.

"Keep a good look-out for my return, Sam," he said. "I can't say when it will be—most likely the moment when you least expect me."

He slightly slackened the rein as he spoke.

Satan had already been chafing at the delay in starting, and bounded off at once.

As he rode thus swiftly out of the inn yard, the captain fancied he caught sight of a pale, anxious-looking face watching his departure.

"Poor Jessie!" he muttered. "She is a good lass, but—"

He left the thought unuttered.

The Old Chequers Inn stood quite on the outskirts of the City of York, and therefore a very short time indeed elapsed before Captain Hawk had the open country before him.

As soon as this was the case he loosed the reins, and allowed the horse to go at his own pace.

This was something tremendous.

Trees, hedgerows, solitary houses, and other wayside objects flitted past like swift-fleeting shadows.

A wild enthusiasm took possession of the highwayman's mind as he experienced the exhilaration produced by rapid motion.

Away—away—on and on, further and further still, until Satan's mouth became filled with white flakes of foam.

Presently the captain gently drew the rein.

By slow degrees, Satan's speed was lessened, until he was reduced to an easy trot.

"Surely this is far enough from York," said Captain Hawk. "It's a dozen miles at least from here to the Old Chequers, and so I don't care how soon something comes in the way."

Stopping his horse altogether—for he had reached a spot that seemed most favourable for his purpose—the

highwayman proceeded to make a deliberate and careful examination of his weapons.

One he paid especial attention to.

This was a pistol.

It was altogether a remarkable weapon.

The barrel was of unusual length, and glittered like polished silver.

The butt had nothing pistol-like about it, being, in fact, more suggestive of the handle of a carpenter's saw.

This gave it an odd appearance.

But, as might be seen, this was the captain's favourite weapon, strange and peculiar as it might look.

The strangest thing in connection with it was, that the highwayman addressed it just as he would a living creature.

It had a name—

A most significant name—

Death!

By this appellation the highwayman not only spoke of but to it.

"There, Death," he exclaimed, putting the pistol in his belt in such a way that he felt would enable him to seize it in an instant, "I am ready now for anything that may betide! You are my truest friend, for I never knew you to fail me in the hour of need."

Although made as plainly, perhaps, as any firearm could be—we mean with regard to the chased mountings which are usually seen upon such things—yet it would have been hard to match it with one more beautifully finished in every part.

The lock was everything that it was supposed possible for a lock to be in those days, when nipples and percussion caps were undreamt of.

The peculiar formation of the handle is worthy of consideration even in these days, when it hardly seems possible to bring firearms any closer to perfection.

The saw-like shape we have described, however, had many advantages, which showed it to be far superior to the stock in common use.

It was expressly framed to suit the grasp of the captain's hand—the shape permitted a firm hold to be taken in a moment.

Nor was this all.

The butt being grooved so as to receive each finger separately enabled the weapon to be held with remarkable steadiness, and that tendency to pull upwards that exists in every pistol as now made was completely done away with.

Captain Hawk could take an instant steady and true aim with it, and as the lock was good, and he paid particular attention to the loading, it was rarely indeed, if ever, that he failed to hit the mark with it.

He always relied upon it for use in that emergency when a shot would get him out of his difficulty.

He listened intently for some moments after the examination of his pistols, but no sound indicating the approach of a traveller was borne to his ears.

"The road is strangely deserted," he muttered; "but I must exercise my patience a little. Perhaps, when they do begin to come, they will follow quickly."

He prepared to wait.

But Captain Hawk happened to be one of those individuals who find it impossible to remain still for any length of time.

Even during the few moments he did remain immovable his brain was busily at work.

"That's a good idea," he broke out, all at once—"a very good idea. I've a good mind to try it. I should be saved a world of trouble, I daresay."

Again Captain Hawk listened.

But the highway remained as silent as before.

This decided him.

He at once set about the execution of his idea.

What its nature was will be very quickly seen by his actions.

First of all he dismounted, and leaving his horse to wander whither he pleased, for he knew he could recall him in an instant when he wished to do so, he went towards the side of the road.

By his manner it was clear he was looking for something.

He walked on for a few yards, and stopped at a gate that led into a meadow.

Glancing across the road, he was just able to make out

there was a similar gate as nearly as possible opposite to him.

"The very thing," he cried—"nothing could be better!" The gate close to which he stood was only fastened by means of a piece of chain wrapped round the post; consequently, it was easy enough to open it.

This was his next proceeding.

He pulled at the gate until it was at right angles to the road, and then by means of a couple of large stones lying hard by he contrived to fix it in this position.

Then crossing over, he treated the opposite gate in just the same way.

From this it will be seen he had, with very little expenditure of time and trouble, erected a barrier that blocked up two-thirds of the high-road.

"A couple of good hurdles now, if I could only find them, would finish the job nicely," he said, surveying what he had already accomplished with great satisfaction.

In the country it was not likely he would have to look far without finding some hurdles.

He found some close at hand, and quickly selected two which he judged just fitting to his purpose.

The barrier, though now complete—that is to say, stretching continuously from one side of the highway to the other—was by no means strong.

Indeed, very little would suffice to bear it down.

But it was strong enough to answer Captain Hawk's purpose, especially when he had fortified it by means of a few more of the large stones, of which plenty were lying about.

"There," he exclaimed, "I am ready now, and travellers may come just as soon as they think proper—they will find me prepared. Hi, Satan! here, boy, here!"

He did not raise his voice much.

But the faithful animal heard it.

Faithfully and readily, as some well-trained dog might do, the horse trotted to his side.

Mourning was by no means a lengthy or laborious action for Captain Hawk to accomplish.

He seemed to give but one spring from the ground and then to be firmly fixed in his seat.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he thrust his right foot carelessly into the stirrup, "just in the very nick of time! Now, I call this providential. How very kind to wait till I had finished!"

It was the unmistakable sound produced by the approach of some vehicle which had brought these words to his lips.

And in the easiest manner possible to conceive, as though it was the best sport imaginable, he held himself in readiness for action.

"Drawn by one horse, running on two wheels, and on the road to York," were the comments made by the captain.

He was quite right.

In less than a moment he caught sight of two star-like looking lights in the distance.

They rapidly approached, and ere long he was able to distinguish the upper portion of the horse that was harnessed to the gig, and, very dimly, the forms of two persons sitting in it.

The horse was coming on at a round trot, and so great was the silence that the captain could hear the murmur of conversation.

The speakers must have been interested in what they were saying or they would have seen the barrier before them sooner than they did; but perhaps one reason for this was, that knowing the roadway to be perfectly clear in this part they did not trouble themselves to keep a good look-out.

CHAPTER MCXXIX.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE REMARKABLE PROCEEDINGS OF CAPTAIN HAWK.

THE horse, however, showed himself to be far more prudent and sagacious.

Seeing something in his path, he resolutely came to a stop, planting his fore feet upon the roadway in a manner which seemed suggestive of his determination to go no further.

The stoppage aroused the people in the vehicle.

The lamps at the side enabled them to see in a moment



[THE FATE OF ANTROBUS SKELLUM.]

that some strange-looking barricade had been stretched across the road.

The discovery was accompanied by a shrill scream.

"Oh, Alfred," said a female voice, "we are lost and undone! We shall be robbed, I am sure we shall!"

"And if we are, whose fault will it be?" was the rough rejoinder of her companion. "It was you who would insist upon travelling to-night, instead of waiting till morning, as I wanted to do."

"Oh, you mean, pitiful wretch—you base, base-hearted villain! Perhaps you think I did not see through your pretty little plan? I have got eyes in my head, I rather think! I know what you wanted to stop for! Fine doings, indeed!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself," growled her husband, "but just take hold of the reins while I jump down and see what this is in front!" Dash me, if I can make it out!"

No. 252.—BLACK BESS.

The lady screamed again.

This time with thrice as much shrillness.

Dimly and imperfectly she had caught sight of the form of Captain Hawk.

"Oh, mercy! Help!" she shrieked. "Here he is—a highwayman! I knew we were going to be robbed!"

"Robbed!" ejaculated the captain, in a deep voice. "I hope you will not shock me by pronouncing such a word while I am by."

"Oh, goodness!"

Captain Hawk came still nearer.

He was careful, however, to keep as much out of the direct rays of the lamp as possible.

"Who are you, sir?" asked the man in the gig, with a great assumption of fierceness and valour—"who are you, I should like to know?"

"A gentleman."

"I am glad to hear it—I took you for a——"

"Hold your row, will you!" cried his wife. "You're not fit to be allowed to open your mouth! Do you want to insult the gentleman?"

"Certainly not; but I should be glad if he would tell us what it is that stops the way."

"A private gate," replied Captain Hawk, with the utmost gravity.

"A private gate! What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

"But this is a public road, and perfectly free to anyone who may choose to travel along it. No one can put up a private gate on the highway."

"There you are quite wrong," said the captain, "for, as you see, here it is."

"But what is it for?"

"My own convenience."

The travellers were bewildered.

What to make of the captain they knew not.

Certainly his manners were not those of a common robber.

Whether they had anything to fear from him or not they could not decide.

He seemed quite at his ease, and not in the least hurry or confusion.

"Your own convenience, sir!" said the lady, at length, perceiving her companion seemed too astonished to continue the conversation. "Excuse me, sir, but I do not understand you."

"A few words will make all quite clear," returned the captain, with a great affectation of politeness.

"Indeed sir!"

"Yes, I am here to collect subscriptions for a charitable and truly praiseworthy object; but, as I am sorry to say, there are some people in the world so void of principle that they would shuffle out of such a matter. I have been compelled to set up this temporary obstruction."

"In other words," growled the man, "you have stopped up the road simply in order that you may rob us with greater ease and convenience to yourself."

"Really, sir," returned the captain, "I am truly surprised that so respectable a man as you appear to be should make use of such a disreputable word. Rob! Bah! I can't bear the idea of anything so mean and vulgar."

"Good!" said the traveller. "I rather like that, I confess. Rob, forsooth! What have you in your mind now, I should like to know? Why don't you call a spade a spade?"

"What a fool you must be," broke in his better half, "to insult the gentleman in that fashion!"

"Gentleman be d-d! He is a fine gentleman!"

"Such language," said Captain Hawk, professing the utmost disgust, "is horrible—truly horrible! I hope I shall hear no more of it, but that you will pay attention to what I am going to say."

"Speak on, sir—speak on, sir," said the lady. "We shall be glad to listen."

"Thank you," answered Hawk, with a bow. "As I said, I am here to-night to receive subscriptions for a praiseworthy object. Those who are wise contribute liberally, and are allowed to ride on without further molestation; while those who refuse, compel me to make use of arguments."

The wife nudged her husband.

"Give him something," she said, "and perhaps he will allow us to go on."

The captain's ears were quick enough to catch the import of what was said, and he replied, instantly:

"Certainly; there will be no further obstruction; but, understand me, if you offer any unworthy sum I shall resent it as an insult."

"And may I ask the object of this contribution?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Be good enough to inform me, then."

"One of my best friends happens to be in an unfortunate situation, from which he may be relieved by money."

"I suppose some rascally comrade of yours is in jail?"

"If you will insist on representing facts in such a vulgar way," said the captain, "why, I must admit you are right."

"I never heard of anything so cool in my life! D—n me, sir! I could laugh; but—but you are carrying the joke a little too far. You would ask me for money, and what you intend to do with it is to help the escape of one of your associates from prison!"

"It's no joke at all."

"Why, if I gave you a farthing for such a purpose," continued the traveller, "I should be neither more nor less than an accessory before the fact."

"Before or behind is all one to me," returned Hawk.

"I mean to have your contribution notwithstanding."

"What if I refuse compliance with your demand?"

"You had better not do so."

"But suppose I do?"

"I should be compelled to have recourse to arguments."

As he spoke, the highwayman drew forth a pistol and cocked it with an audible click.

The sound was one which jarred upon the ears of the travellers.

The lady screamed.

Her husband uttered an angry curse.

"I have your folly to thank for this!" he muttered wrathfully. "But it serves me right for not acting according to my own judgment. I hate to ride in the dark, and I will never do it again."

"Come, sir," said Hawk, "I have no more time to spare. Hand over!"

"What do you want?"

"As much as you like. Take care how you offer me too little—the consequence you will find to be rather serious. Be reasonable, and you will be allowed to ride on."

"Unreasonable, you mean."

"Just as you please," returned the captain, as imperturbably as ever.

Such a manner was, to say the least of it, intensely aggravating.

The traveller doubtless thought to behave in a liberal manner, for he opened a small leather bag and took from it several gold pieces.

"I beg your pardon," said Captain Hawk—"I ought to have told you that I make it part of my system never to take loose money. Be good enough to hand me the bag just as it is. Thank you!"

While he spoke, the captain outstretched his arm and took hold of the bag.

The traveller was so amazed at this last speech that for a second or two he could do nothing but stare.

When he recovered himself the bag was gone.

It had found a secure resting-place at the bottom of one of the highwayman's pockets.

"You may pass on now," he said. "The contribution is sufficient. Many thanks! Good night!"

He removed the hurdles as he spoke.

The traveller seemed at first inclined to protest against this appropriation of his money.

Most likely, however, he remembered the captain's pistol, and consequently altered his mind.

Seizing hold of the whip, he gave the horse so smart a cut with it that the poor beast snorted with pain, and set off at a highly dangerous pace.

Rapid as it was, yet, nevertheless, Captain Hawk caught a few words which the traveller addressed to his wife that seemed to indicate that he would visit his annoyance and vexation upon her.

This, as the reader may suppose, occasioned the captain but little uneasiness.

The bag, though small, was weighty, and, as it appeared to him, contained nothing but gold.

If so, the amount would be considerable.

Too careless, however, to take the trouble to ascertain this, Captain Hawk set to work to restore his barrier to its former condition.

"Upon my word," he said, "this is a capital plan. I can't imagine how it is I never thought of it before."

He had barely time to finish making his preparations when his acute sense of hearing informed him that there were more travellers upon the road.

"Just in time," he muttered, as he regained his place upon Satan's back. "I hope I may be as fortunate this time."

The sounds were less equivocal.

The captain was able to pronounce with certainty upon what was coming.

"Two horsemen," he murmured, "and coming from York. If my late friends gave them a hint of what is in store for them, I may have some trouble. But what does it matter?"

He hummed a few lines from one of the most popular airs, and prepared himself for business.

The horsemen came on rapidly—so rapidly that the captain began to think they could have no suspicion of the existence of the barrier across the roadway.

Nor had they light of any kind to make it visible.

"They have no suspicions," murmured Hawk, getting a pistol ready for use; "and yet one would have thought that that man, having been robbed himself, would have been generous enough to put others on their guard against suffering a like loss. But no—no; that would not be in accordance with human nature."

The highwayman was right there.

It would be a satisfaction to the late traveller, beyond a doubt, when he saw that others were in a fair way of falling into the snare.

"Hullo!" said one of the new-comers, suddenly, for his horse stopped all at once, almost unseating him in doing so; "what the devil is the matter?"

His companion happened to be a pace or two behind him, and drew the rein.

"The matter?" he asked. "Where? What do you mean?"

"There's something in the road."

"What is it?"

"That's what I can't make out."

Up to this moment, Captain Hawk had kept himself completely in the background.

The two travellers had not the remotest suspicion that there was a mounted man near them.

Their surprise, therefore, may be imagined when they beheld the highwayman suddenly beside them.

Where he had come from they could not think.

Hawk did not allow them the opportunity of asking.

"There seems to be some obstruction in the roadway, gentlemen," he said, politely.

"There not only seems to be, but there actually is," was the reply. "Some one has been putting hurdles up. What the devil does it mean?"

"The explanation is simple enough, gentlemen."

"Indeed! Can you give it?"

"Certainly."

"Do so, then."

"This is a place appointed for toll taking," the captain continued, with the utmost gravity, "and I have been placed here to collect the dues."

"Toll!" said one of the gentlemen. "Ridiculous! You must be either mad or drunk!"

"You will find me neither one nor the other."

"Get out of the way! Down with the hurdles, Arthur!"

"Touch them who dare!" exclaimed Captain Hawk, with a sudden and startling alteration in his voice. "Gentlemen," he added, "you cannot pass here without paying tolls. If you do so quietly, all will be well."

"A highwayman, by Jove, Arthur!"

"So it seems; but he will find it no easy matter to rob the pair of us single-handed. Get your pistols ready, and stand firm!"

"As you please," said Captain Hawk, with his demeanour as unflinched as it was at first, "only I warn you, if you resist, I shall not let you go until I have taken every article of the least value that you may have about your person. On the other hand, if you like to surrender your purses quietly, you may ride on without further loss, or the least fear of violence."

His words did not fail to produce the effect.

The young man who had spoken about making a resistance now looked rather irresolutely at his comrade.

"May we believe you at your word?" he said, at length.

"Most certainly," answered Hawk.

"Then," said Arthur, "I am not going to risk a shot for the sake of a purse. Here is mine—take it!"

As he spoke he pulled a good-sized purse from his pocket, and tossed it towards the highwayman, who was dexterous enough to catch it in spite of the darkness.

The other traveller required no urging to follow his friend's example.

No doubt, to both of them, the loss of a purse was a trifling enough matter—certainly not of sufficient moment to make it worth while for them to run the least personal risk in the hope of retaining it.

"Many thanks," said Captain Hawk. "I have now all that I require."

He knocked down the hurdle as he spoke.

The young man who had been called Arthur was filled with surprise at finding that the barrier was of such a frail description.

"I'll give you my word," he said, "if I had had any idea the hurdles would have gone down with a push, I should have tried to keep my purse. At any rate, you would have had to gallop for it."

"Take my word for it," responded the captain, significantly, "things could not by any means have turned out better for you than they have. Be satisfied. Good night!"

The young men rode through the gap, and were quickly lost to sight in the darkness.

Captain Hawk remained a moment or two in hesitation.

"I have been tolerably successful," he muttered; "and the hour is getting too late for people to be abroad. Shall I be content, and make my way back again?"

After a little deliberation, the captain resolved to wait, at any rate, a short time longer upon the chance that there might be some late traveller to encounter.

But all was still, and all remained so until the highwayman's patience was exhausted.

"There's nothing more to be done to-night," he muttered, somewhat reluctantly. "But I will not complain."

He dismounted, in order to remove all traces of his barrier.

This did not occupy him many minutes, and it was just as he had finished that the distant hoofbeats of a horse reached his ears.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "What could be more annoying than this? Why couldn't he come a few minutes sooner, I should like to know? But never mind—it don't much matter."

It would have required a much more serious thing than this to ruffle Captain Hawk's composure.

He was one of those happy individuals who always make a point of taking everything by the smooth handle.

Regaining the saddle, he waited with all imaginable calmness until the traveller should reach him.

By this time the waning moon had risen.

The sky was too thickly covered with clouds for her beams to have much effect in dissipating the darkness, yet every now and then the silvery orb would show herself through one of the long, straggling rifts.

It was when she broke forth in this way that the traveller reached a spot within a few paces of where Captain Hawk was standing.

The moonbeams fell with full power upon the forms of both.

A mutual recognition took place.

Captain Hawk was the first to speak.

"Skellum!" he said. "By Jove, it's Skellum!"

CHAPTER MCXXX.

CAPTAIN HAWK COMMENCES HIS PREPARATIONS FOR EFFECTING THE ESCAPE OF DICK TURPIN FROM YORK CASTLE.

It was indeed no other than that indefatigable individual with whom Captain Hawk had so strangely met.

There could be no mistaking him.

It was not an easy matter to startle Skellum.

But surely, if ever he was startled, he was then.

"By all that's d—nable," he at last ejaculated, "it's Captain Hawk!"

Almost before the words had left his lips he drew forth a pistol, and rapidly levelling it, fired point-blank at the highwayman.

But the captain was prepared, and a slight touch of the rein caused Satan to swerve so suddenly as to foil the treacherous shot.

"Bullet for bullet, my friend!" cried Hawk, in a loud voice.

The report of his bright-barreled pistol mingled with and half drowned his words.

By what took place it would almost seem as though Skellum had attempted to follow the highwayman's plan of avoiding a bullet.

Whether this was so or not is a thing that cannot be determined.

But Skellum's horse suddenly made an odd plunging kind of movement—one for which his rider was not prepared, for in the twinkling of an eye the thief-hunter was lying on the ground.

So rapidly did this take place, and so entirely unexpected was the occurrence, that Captain Hawk was a second or two before he could credit his own senses.

There lay Skellum, however, upon the high-road, without displaying the least sign of motion.

Being cast completely over his horse's neck, he had fallen in a most awkward manner.

His head had struck the ground first, and the force of the blow was great, the roadway being as hard as a mass of iron.

His neck had then bent in some strange way, and he now laid with his head bent upon his breast.

Mechanically, Captain Hawk returned his discharged pistol to his belt.

"This is odd indeed!" he said. "Very—very strange! Is he dead, I wonder!"

Disposed as he was to make light of almost everything that took place, the highwayman on this occasion found himself unusually serious.

Skellum still remained as he had fallen.

Whether dead or only insensible it was impossible to say.

The captain deliberated with himself for a few seconds as to whether he should ride away without taking any more notice, or whether he should really attempt to find out whether the fall had been a mortal one.

The latter course was decided upon.

Not that he had any feelings of compassion towards his foe, but chiefly on the score of curiosity.

"I could hardly be content to remain in a state of doubt upon the point," he muttered, as he dismounted slowly. "It will, I daresay, be easy enough to ascertain."

Nevertheless, it was with an inward sensation of repugnance and aversion that he approached the prostrate form.

He touched it with his foot.

Skellum never stirred or gave utterance to a sound.

Overcoming his aversion by a violent effort, Hawk stooped down.

His foe was lying very awkwardly, and it was only after the exercise of much strength and trouble that he laid him, face upward, on the roadway.

The moon was not shining very brightly now, but the clouds showed a diffused light, which enabled him to see with sufficient clearness.

"Dead!" said the captain, after a momentary inspection of Skellum's pallid face. "Dead, for a thousand pounds!"

Such a sudden transition from life to death as this could scarcely have failed to make an impression upon the most callous and unreflecting heart.

Certainly the captain was not unaffected.

It cannot be said that the death of such a man as Skellum would cause him any regret; such would not have been the fact; yet he could not but be awed by the awful suddenness of the event.

In order to satisfy himself upon the point, he made another and closer examination.

But the result was the same.

Skellum was dead!

"He is past all human skill and past all meddling in human matters," the captain said, as he turned away. "It will be a shock to the next person who comes this way. At any rate, it is no concern of mine, and the sooner I am away from the spot the better, for it is quite possible that if it should be known I was the last in his company, his death would be laid upon my shoulders."

This was a reasonable enough supposition; and feeling that it was so, the captain hastened to make his way back to his snug quarters in York.

"I wonder how Dick will receive the news!" he murmured. "He will have no regrets, I fancy, except that

he died so painless a death. Ah, well! We must take things as we find them—certainly Dick's escape now looks a far more likely matter, for Skellum was indefatigable."

This was a comfortable reflection, and as it was no part of the captain's philosophy to make himself miserable, he dwelt upon it for a considerable length of time.

"I have nothing to fear now on the score of funds," he continued; "and for the rest I see nothing before me to cause despair. If I do not set Dick at liberty, I shall never forgive myself, but always consider I had a hand in his death."

This was certainly looking at the matter from an extreme point of view, for in actual fact there was little blame attached to him.

So altered as Dick was at the time, it was next to an impossibility that he should have recognised him.

But the captain chose to think differently.

He blamed himself for having been guilty of a most fatal carelessness.

Should his design succeed, however, there could be no question that he had made an ample atonement for his fault, if so it can be called.

The high-road was quite deserted, and Hawk reached the Old Chequers Inn without meeting with a single person.

The ostler was waiting for his return, and so was another.

The former the captain saw, not the latter.

Had he chanced to glance up at one of the windows to the back part of the inn, he could not fail to catch a glimpse of the pale, interesting face of the girl Jessie.

"Is all well, Sam?"

"Yes, Cap'n; I think I may venture to say so."

"Venture? What do you mean?"

"Why, after you had gone, some one came here to look for you, so it was quite as well you made up your mind to take a ride for an hour or two."

"Who was it?"

"Well, that I didn't know at first, but I found out afterwards."

"Who was it, I say?"

"I don't be impatient, captain. They told me his name was Skellum."

"Ah!"

"And that he was death on to all the highwaymen."

"And now death is on to him."

"What do you say, cap'n?"

"Nothing at least, it does not matter. Let me see you put Satan all right, and I will try a turn-in for an hour or two."

"Can't you trust me to do it, cap'n?"

"Yes, I daresay I could; but I would prefer using my own eyes for all that."

The ostler said no more.

The highwayman's steed was taken into the stable and thoroughly attended to.

When the operation was complete, the captain crossed the inn yard again to the little door which we mentioned on a former occasion.

Now, as then, it yielded to his touch.

But he took the precaution to secure it after him, and then stepped cautiously along the passage.

A fire was still burning, and the apartment presented that appearance of comfort which nothing but the presence of a woman can impart.

Very probably much of this was quite lost upon Captain Hawk—at least, such may be inferred by the indifferent manner in which he crossed the chamber and entered an adjoining room.

This was fitted up with the same neatness as a bed-chamber.

Having satisfied himself that everything presented its usual aspect, he prepared to sleep.

His right hand grasped the singularly-shaped butt of his ominously-named pistol, and so he fell into a profound slumber.

The habit of sleeping with his fingers encircling his weapon was so firmly fixed that he would have found it next to an impossibility to close his eyes without doing so.

At the Old Chequers, however, he had nothing to fear.

Morning came without anything whatever having

taken place to disturb him, nor did he awake until the sun shone full upon his face.

"I am later than I intended to be," he muttered; "yet if I make haste I shall be in time."

It was evident, by his manner, that he had business on hand of more than usual importance.

His morning preparations were soon completed.

In one corner of the room was a large chest, and this he opened by means of a key that he took from an inner pocket.

Just under the lid was a small travelling portmanteau of the kind then carried by almost everyone who had to make a journey, at the time when locomotion was so different a thing from what it is now.

This he took out, and nothing else.

Carefully locking the chest again, he threw on his ample cloak, which not only to a very great extent served as a disguise, but also concealed what he was carrying in his hand, and prepared to depart.

He made his way quickly to the stables, saw that Satan was safe and well, and then turning to the ostler, said:

"Mind, I leave him in your charge, and shall hold you responsible if anything happens to him."

"Make your mind easy about that, cap'n. When shall you be back?"

"I cannot say—I can only tell you to be prepared at any minute."

So saying, with an easy and confident step, as though he had nothing in the world to dread from recognition, he left the inn yard.

"He's a rum'un—he is," the ostler said, confidentially to himself. "What I should call a regular out-and-outer. Sam's wrong if something more isn't heard of Captain Hawk than of any other gentleman highwayman who ever cried 'Stand!' on the high-road."

Having delivered himself of this opinion, the ostler returned to his duties.

Captain Hawk took the nearest way out of the city, and when he had fairly gained the open country, plunged into the intricacies of narrow lanes with a readiness which showed that he must have possessed a very familiar acquaintance with the locality.

At length, crossing a stile, he strode rapidly along a narrow footpath, which apparently led in a direct line towards a wood, which seemed to be of great extent.

"All's well!" muttered Hawk, as he glanced around him. "Not a soul in sight."

So saying, he quickened his steps.

On entering the wood, he followed the footpath for a short distance only, but turned off to the right, where the trees grew most densely, and disappeared.

It was very nearly an hour after this event that a wood-cutter, whistling blithely, crossed the stile we have before had occasion to mention.

It was evident that the wood was his destination, for he followed precisely in the captain's steps.

When within perhaps a dozen paces of those trees which formed a border to the wood, he caught the sound of a footstep, which caused him to raise his eyes and look straight before him.

He then beheld emerging from the trees a person who by his attire was a Roman Catholic priest.

The reverend father advanced with a devout footstep, apparently being busily engaged in communing with himself.

Now, this poor wood-cutter happened to be a Catholic, and upon catching sight of one of the ministers of his religion he made a low obeisance.

The priest was to all appearances deeply absorbed in his meditations, for he started when he saw the wood-cutter bowing devoutly before him.

But regaining his composure, as one may say, immediately, he muttered some words in a tone too low for them to be audible.

The wood-cutter seemed to be satisfied, however, for he resumed his way.

"So far, very good," murmured the priest, when sure the man was out of ear-shot. "My disguise has imposed upon you, at any rate, so I may reasonably look for like success elsewhere."

As the reader must know, this seeming priest was no other than Captain Hawk, though the disguise was so excellent and the make-up so perfect, that it would have

required a more than ordinary amount of a astuteness to have guessed at his identity.

But Captain Hawk had quite a talent for disguises.

On reaching the stile he once more carefully surveyed the surrounding scene.

"That must be my way," he said at length. "It cannot be far from here, I know."

Feeling quite sure that there were no prying eyes upon him, the captain strode along at what would have been considered an unseemly pace for one of his cloth.

At length he reached a handsome pair of lodge gates, apparently communicating with a mansion of no ordinary importance.

The gates were closed, but the captain gave a summons for admittance.

The woman who emerged from the lodge unlocked the gates without venturing to ask a single question.

Muttering something that might be supposed a blessing, the captain passed on.

The avenue was a long one, and some time elapsed before he came in sight of the mansion.

"A comfortable place," he muttered, when his eyes first encountered it. "Surely whoever dwells there should be happy."

With a degree of boldness which argued well for the captain's strength of nerve, he walked direct to the imposing-looking front-door and rang the bell.

"Is Sir Humphrey within?" he asked of the servant.

"He is, holy sir."

The seeming priest was ushered into a small room, there to wait the baronet's appearance—for it was to Sir Humphrey Yeoman's residence that the captain had thus boldly made his way.

He had not long to wait before the baronet made his appearance.

"Your business?" he said, briefly; for priests were no favourites of his, and he was apt to treat them with scant civility.

"Sir Humphrey," said Captain Hawk, in low, monotonous tones, "I come to you in your magisterial capacity."

The baronet inclined his head slightly.

"I wish you to favour me with a letter that will enable me to have free and unrestricted communion with a prisoner who is now in York Castle, and who is sadly in want of my spiritual aid."

"Do you mean Dick Turpin?"

"I do."

"Then, if I thought Dick wanted you, and that you could do him any good, I would give you the order in a moment. But," he interrupted, "surely there can be no need for my influence in this matter. The cells are always free to the spiritual advisers of the accused."

"Ordinarily, your worship," said Hawk, with a great show of meekness; "but in the present case, such stringent precautions have been adopted, in consequence of the dread the authorities have that an escape would be attempted, that I fear, unless protected by the signature of some influential gentleman like yourself, I shall be subjected to all kinds of impediments."

"Well," said Sir Humphrey, "as I told you a moment or two ago, if I thought Dick wanted you, and that you could do him the least good, you could command me in any way you think proper."

During his conversation with Dick, Captain Hawk had gathered a tolerably clear notion of Sir Humphrey's character, and after such an unequivocal admission as he had just made, he felt strongly tempted to tell him all.

"Believe me," said the captain, after a momentary pause, and raising his eyes for the first time to the baronet's countenance—"believe me that Dick does want me, and that I can do him much good."

The words were pronounced in so significant a tone, that the baronet could not help being struck by them.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say."

"But explain yourself. If you are a friend of Dick Turpin's, as I suspect you are, despite your cloth, do not hesitate to confide in me."

CHAPTER MOXXXI.

CAPTAIN HAWK PAYS DICK TURPIN ANOTHER VISIT IN
YORK CASTLE.

"I WILL not hesitate," said Captain Hawk, with sudden resolution, "for I know you are to be wholly trusted, and therefore I will tell you all."

The baronet nodded, as though to intimate that this was decidedly the best course that could be adopted.

"This, then, is a disguise."

"I thought as much."

"I am Dick's last remaining comrade, and, to a certain extent, to blame for what has happened to him."

"How do you mean?"

The captain explained.

"Go on."

"The fault committed cannot be recalled; but one thing remains to me, and that is to make reparation. This I have sworn to do."

"And what do you propose?"

"To assist him to escape."

Sir Humphrey looked grave.

"You need not fear that I shall compromise you in the matter. There is no need for anyone to know that you even suspect me to be other than I seem. Let me give you the assurance that I shall not play my part clumsily; or if I am discovered, no one will have to suffer for it but myself."

"But, seriously, do you think you stand any chance of success?"

"Certainly I do, or I should not contemplate making the attempt."

"Then, let me tell you that in my opinion you stand scarcely the ghost of a chance."

Captain Hawk smiled.

"Leave that to me, your worship. If you are in earnest in saying that you wish to befriend Dick, believe me you cannot choose a more effectual way of doing so than by writing me the free pass I require."

"You shall have it."

"Many thanks! Of course it will be sufficient?"

"Oh yes! I have only to tell you that you must be cautious."

"For Dick's sake, you may rely upon it, I shall be."

Sir Humphrey sat down, and taking a pen, scribbled a few words upon a sheet of paper, and then, with a vast deal of flourish, appended his signature.

"There," he said—"that will do."

"My best thanks are your due," answered Captain Hawk, carefully securing the much-prized document; "and I trust the next intelligence you may receive will be that Dick is once more at liberty."

"Get him out of the country, if you can. It is a thousand pities he should die by such a death as I fear awaits him. Say from me that as soon as he reaches foreign parts he is to write and make me acquainted with his whereabouts."

"This is most generous."

"Tut, tut! He would do, and has done, ten times as much for me. He showed me very plainly that I was blindly labouring to secure my daughter's misery, not her happiness. But never mind that now. Money will be required for the accomplishment of your plan. Take this to aid you; if you want more, apply to me."

He placed a well-filled bag of money in the captain's hand.

"Don't refuse it, as Dick did," he added. "He told me he had no occasion for it, but you must know better. All I ask is that you keep my share in this transaction a secret."

"Rely upon me," answered Captain Hawk. "Thanks to fortune, I am not short of funds; but yet your gift will be certain to prove useful."

Little more of any importance was exchanged.

The captain himself was by no means inclined to prolong the interview, because the day was getting on apace, and he had much to do.

On taking his leave, he made his way back direct to York.

He was careful to avoid passing near the Old Chequers Inn.

On arriving at the Castle, which was his destination,

he presented his pass, and, to his great satisfaction, was admitted without demur.

To Dick Turpin the hours had followed each other very slowly since his friend had paid him his visit.

He had had no other companionship but his own thoughts, which were gloomy and sad indeed, yet even these were preferable to the annoyance perpetual interruptions caused him.

Having had no intimation of the captain's intention, he naturally looked surprised when he saw so monkish-looking an individual appear upon the threshold.

The jailer seemed inclined to linger in the cell, but after a time withdrew.

The sham priest seated himself beside the prisoner, bending his head so much forward that his features could not be distinguished by anyone.

"Keep quiet, Dick," he said, in tones scarcely above a whisper. "The cell door is not shut, and if you raise your voice I shall be in danger of detection."

Dick had to make use of all his self-command while his comrade thus spoke.

Until he opened his lips he had no suspicion of his visitor's identity—a strong and convincing proof of the captain's skill in disguising himself.

"Give me your hand," said Turpin—"let me press it only for an instant, and then I shall feel more sure as to who you are."

"There—there, that will do. Such an action as that, if seen, would betray us."

A hurried pressure of hands took place.

"How strange it seems," said Dick, "that, in defiance of all the strongest regulations which have been adopted, you should be able to make your way here, as it seems, just when you choose."

"It is more in appearance than in reality. I have seen Sir Humphrey once more, and my object in doing so was to obtain his signature. Armed with that, I at once disarm a thousand suspicions, because it would be considered that he would not give it to me unless he knew who I was, and felt I could be trusted."

"I see," said Dick. "Such a credential would be invaluable."

"Exactly. But never mind that. I have other matters of greater importance than that to talk about. Skellum is dead."

"What?"

"Hush—hush! You must be more cautious or we shall be ruined."

"Did I hear rightly?"

"You did."

"Repeat it."

"Skellum is dead!"

The captain then followed with a description of the events of the night.

"I lived in hopes of having a reckoning with him some day," said Dick. "I could almost regret that he is gone."

"Pooh—pooh! You ought to look upon it as a piece of extraordinary good fortune. Without his never-ceasing supervisions all these precautions will be relaxed—more especially when it is seen that there really seems no necessity for them."

"There is encouragement in that."

"Encouragement! I should think there is! Before, the escape was only possible—now it is probable: that is, if you will perform your part."

"Can you have any doubt about my doing that?"

"I ought not to have."

"You have heard when the trial is to take place?"

"At the next assizes."

"Do you know when they commence?"

"No. Do you?"

"Yes—in three days' time."

"In three days?" repeated the captain. "That leaves but little time for preparation."

"Too little, I fear. The time between now and then will be one of incessant preparation. There will hardly be a chance."

This intelligence plunged Captain Hawk for some time in deep reflection.

He had not expected that the trial would come on so soon, and in consequence the plans he had laid were a little deranged.

"Why are you silent?" asked Dick Turpin.

"I was thinking—about the escape."

"No doubt, you are of the same opinion as myself."

"What is that?"

"Why, that it will be wisest to defer the attempt until after the trial; not that I have anything to hope from it, but because then I believe the chances of success will be so much greater."

"And three days is not very long to make all preparations," added the captain.

"Not time enough, rely upon it. At the trial I shall take care to behave as though I was deeply impressed with the feeling that it was useless to resist, and that I had resigned myself to an inevitable fate."

"No doubt that will throw them off their guard, especially as you have nothing now to fear from Skellum's personal interference. If we could only get the guard removed which watches round the exterior of the prison, the rest would be comparatively easy."

While speaking these last words, he took from beneath his robe a small packet, which he slipped quietly and stealthily into Dick's hand.

"Never mind looking at it now; secrete it somewhere until you are sure you have a good opportunity."

"Thanks," said Dick, giving instant obedience. "I may be sure it is something valuable."

"I believe you will find it so. The parcel contains several small skeleton keys of various sizes. They are the best things of the kind to be had for money. I noticed yesterday that your irons were locked upon you, not riveted. You will now, I hope, be able to free yourself from them in the night, and enjoy something like repose; only you must be careful to put them on again in the morning."

"If I can manage that," said Dick, "it will be a boon indeed. These heavy irons, so constantly upon my limbs, cramp me and weigh me down. To be rid of them, if only for an hour, would be an indescribable relief."

"Then I think you will be able to accomplish it to-night. In the meanwhile, I shall set carefully to work, and see that all things are in perfect readiness. I will go now, for my visit has already been a long one."

"And shall you come again?"

"I think not till after the trial; at any rate, not unless something sufficiently important occurs to warrant me in doing so. I can render no further service that I am aware of, and by staying away I diminish the chances of my recognition. Not that I study this from a personal motive, but because, if I am taken, all hopes of your escape, I am afraid, will vanish."

"I am sure they will; and not only for my sake, but for your own, be careful."

The captain laughed silently.

Then, rising, he whispered the word farewell.

Fain would Dick have detained him, but he felt he had no reasonable excuse for so doing.

Yet it would be hard to convey any idea of the desolate feeling which took possession of his heart as soon as the door closed behind this faithful and well-tried friend.

To speak the truth, Dick, upon reflection, had felt by no means sanguine as to the result of an escape.

He was resolved to attempt one, however, because, if he perished in the effort, he would rather a thousand times die so than undergo the last dread penalty of the law.

But the intelligence that Skellum had so suddenly and unexpectedly met with his death materially changed his feelings on the subject.

He was in truth the barrier which he had most to dread.

Now he was removed.

The prospect of being able to relieve his body of the terrible weight of his fetters could not fail to afford a certain amount of satisfaction.

It made him long impatiently for the approach of night.

At about nine o'clock every evening the Governor made a round of the entire prison.

On each occasion he had entered Dick's cell and satisfied himself by a careful personal inspection that the prisoner was safe, and that his fetters showed no signs of having been tampered with.

After this visit, Dick was left uninterrupted till the hour of seven in the morning.

Punctual to the hour, the Governor came.

He looked carefully around as usual.

All seemed well.

When the door was closed again and the sound of footsteps along the corridor without had died away, Dick could scarcely contain himself.

He had a chance now to be comparatively free for nearly ten hours.

The packet or skeleton keys had been carefully secreted, and now, with a trembling hand, he drew it forth.

The keys were all small, of such size as would be used for a padlock.

Dick tried several hastily, and at last had the satisfaction of feeling the wards of the lock yield.

In less than ten minutes afterwards he had rid himself of his disagreeable incumbrances altogether.

Of course, he had to display the utmost caution in all his movements, because any unusual clanking of his irons reaching the ears of the man who watched outside might so far arouse suspicion as to cause him to look in.

In the event of such a thing as this, not only would he be discovered, but such precautions adopted as would prevent him from ever achieving his object again.

Almost without making a sound at all, however, Dick laid his fetters one by one aside.

Then, with the most intense sigh of relief which can be conceived, he stood erect.

Oh! it was a glorious thing to be even temporarily free from his manacles, for they seemed not only to weigh down the body, but to crush the mind also.

He stretched every weary limb, and then, taking care to tread lightly, paced up and down the cell.

It was the first exercise he had been permitted to take since the discovery of his identity.

This action very disagreeably impressed upon his mind that he was by no means so strong as he had fancied himself to be.

The temporary depression which this produced he shook off by remembering that it was quite as well he had found it out now instead of at a time when it might be of the utmost importance for him to possess full strength.

"This exercise will benefit me wonderfully," he soliloquised. "In three days' time I shall be thrice as strong as I am now."

Fatigue at length compelled him to return to his seat.

The night was a light one, for the moon was shining in the heavens unobscured by a single cloud.

Her beams chanced to find their way into the cell in such a manner as to light up the greater part of it.

The silvery radiance fell upon the worn and wasted form of the highwayman, who, as he gazed at the bright face of the queen of night, sighed heavily.

Most forcibly was brought to his remembrance the time when, guided by her rays, he had made his way across the country on the back of bonny Black Bess.

He could not think upon the past and maintain his firmness.

His emotions overcame him, and for some time he let them have their way without the least restraint.

But by degrees the violence of his feelings subsided.

Gazing once more upon the moon, the desire came into his mind to climb up to the cell window and see what was visible from without.

He knew his cell was at some height above the ground, and fancied it must be in a tower, for it was partly circular in shape.

Of course he was not long in gratifying a longing of this sort when once he had decided upon it.

The grated aperture in the cell, by courtesy called a window, was high up in the wall, being placed, in fact, close to the juncture of the latter with the ceiling.

But Dick's cell was furnished with a chair and a table, and by placing one on the other he was able to reach to a good height.

It was no easy task, however, to make these preparations without causing any sound that would attract attention, for at this midnight hour a silence like that of the grave itself prevailed in the prison.

At length he mounted, and grasping the bars with his hands, pressed his face closely against them.

Oh, how sweetly and refreshingly the cool night air blew upon his burning brow!

How beautiful the scene looked without now every object was silvered over with the moon's beams!

How ineffable was the yearning he felt to break away from his confinement!

For some moments Dick remained gazing in a kind of ecstasy or trance.

But when calm reason came back to his aid he took more careful note of the situation of his cell window.

In the first place he made the discovery that he was at a much greater height from the ground than he had believed.

But as he looked he saw that the tallest roofs anywhere visible around were considerably below him.

So far as he was able to tell, too, there was a small paved yard protected by a stone wall, which formed a boundary to the prison.

While gazing down he caught sight of the forms of two men who were advancing towards each other.

When within a certain distance they paused, and apparently exchanged some words, though no sound reached Dick's listening ears.

Then turning round, both retraced their steps.

CHAPTER MCXXXII.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN IS BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

DICK TURPIN watched both figures till they disappeared from view.

Then, after a while, they appeared again, advanced to the same spot and retired.

"That is the outside watch of which the captain spoke; and while that is kept up, how am I to escape?"

There seemed to be but one reply which could be given to this question.

While the guard did its duty escape was impossible.

There was just the possibility that, now Skellum was no more, this precaution would, after the trial, be dispensed with as superfluous.

How frail a hope this was everyone must see.

But it was the prisoner's only hope, and he seemed to cling to it with all the more tenacity because he knew it was so slight.

"Were it not for those fellows," he continued, "shortly afterwards, 'I could see my way clear enough, with such aid as Captain Hawk could afford me. A steel saw would be wanted to cut through these bars, a rope long enough to enable me to reach the ground, and then another rope, flung over the outer wall at the proper moment, which would enable me to scale that.'"

After this, escape seemed quite an easy matter, could the men who watched outside be anyhow got rid of.

Dick remained watching for a long time—how long he did not trouble himself to think.

But during the whole of the period, the men kept up their patrolling backwards and forwards with the most provoking regularity.

Wearied out, at length, with watching, and finding that there was nothing else to take cognizance of, and no advantage in remaining there, he cautiously descended.

Yet he felt this was a privilege scarcely to be enough valued, and a feeling of the greatest gratitude towards Captain Hawk held possession of his heart.

There was yet time enough for him to enjoy a good period of repose; but his fear was that, when once falling asleep, his slumber would be so deep that he would be unable to awake at the proper moment.

Nevertheless he flung himself down at full length, enjoying to the utmost the pleasure of stretching his limbs at freedom.

As may be expected, the end of this was that he unconsciously fell off to sleep.

Awaking with a sudden start, he found himself very cold, and surrounded by an intense darkness.

He knew well that when the jailer paid him his first visit it was scarcely daylight, and, therefore, with some repitiation, he set about the task of relocking the fetters upon his limbs.

Never, however, was any necessary act performed with more unwillingness.

He paused several times, for he was strongly assailed with the temptation to spring upon his jailer when he entered, fling him down, and trust to the confusion which would ensue to effect his escape.

The chances of success, however, if he adopted this

course, were so very, very slight, that he felt he could not afford to venture upon it.

If he failed—and the chances were as ten thousand to one that he would fail—more stringent precautions than ever would be taken, instead of a relaxation of those already in force, which was what he was hoping for.

An indiscreet attempt would only serve to mar all chances of the favourable accomplishment of a better-matured plan.

Governed by these considerations, then, he went on with his unwelcome task, though many a heavy, regretful sigh escaped his breast.

He had barely time to finish and to conceal the key which had been of such immense service to him when the sound of distant footsteps warned him of the approach of the turnkey.

Upon entering, the man, according to his custom, glanced around in order to see whether everything presented its usual aspect.

On the present occasion he saw nothing to excite his suspicions, for Dick had been extremely careful to restore everything exactly to its former position.

The day passed without the occurrence of any particular incident to break the monotony of prison life.

Dick was enabled to preserve his cheerfulness by looking forward to the comparative freedom he should enjoy at night.

Towards evening, in accordance with Sir Humphrey's recommendation, Mr. Steel, the solicitor, paid Dick a visit.

"It would be wrong of me," he said, "to lead you to suppose that there is the slightest chance of my being able to do the least good for you. Still, I will watch the case, though that must not buoy you up with any false hopes. I am truly sorry for you, and should rejoice to see you at liberty."

"Many thanks for your kind wishes, but the caution you have just given me is a needless one. I knew well enough from the first that the trial would be a mere form, and that I am as good as sentenced already. It was Sir Humphrey who would insist that you should try to help me."

"And so I will; and what is more, I shall try with all my heart," said the attorney, earnestly. "I cannot forget what you have done; and you may depend that, should anything arise which can possibly be turned to your advantage, it shall be."

"You have my best thanks for that assurance, though still," Dick added, "I know already the termination of the trial."

Mr. Steel must have been fully impressed with the hopelessness of Dick's case, for he never asked him a single question concerning it.

Dick, however, thought fit to set him right as regards the facts.

"Of the particular crime laid to my charge I am not guilty."

"I am afraid that will avail you little."

"I do not expect much from it; still, you may as well know the actual truth."

Dick then described as well as he was able the way in which the ostler met his death.

Mr. Steel shook his head.

"I will bear the particulars in mind," he said; "but you must be aware that the dying witnessed testimony of any person has great weight in a court of law, and you have only your bare word to bring against it."

"I understand you," said Dick. "Still, I should have felt more reconciled had the charge against me possessed some foundation."

The attorney left soon after, and when Dick was left to himself he muttered:

"I am now convinced that I have no hope to look forward to in that quarter."

His sole reliance rested upon Captain Hawk.

It was strong, it is true; but then, he could not help remembering that, after all, it was not much to depend upon.

The captain himself stood in hazard of his life, and was liable to detection at any moment—particularly liable, one would think, when his habitual recklessness and carelessness of consequences is borne in mind.

Should he be discovered or captured, nothing could save Dick from his impending doom.



[DICK TURPIN FAILS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM YORK CASTLE.]

When the prisoner was once again freed from his fetters, he found himself able to take a more cheerful view of matters—a brighter light seemed thrown upon the events of the future.

This went on thus without the occurrence of aught deserving of special mention, until the morning of the trial arrived.

It seems almost needless to say that the deepest interest was manifested by all the inhabitants of the city, and that extraordinary efforts were necessary in order to have a chance of witnessing the interesting proceedings.

A great improvement had taken place in Dick's personal appearance since his last examination, and on the present occasion he paid particular attention to his toilet.

He did not succeed, however, in his attempt to bear some resemblance to his former self—his old acquaintances would scarcely have known him now.

No. 233.—BLACK BIRD.

In fact, at least twenty years seemed to have been added to his age, while his hair was perceptibly streaked with gray.

But his eyes retained their brightness, and many remarked what an eagle-like glance it was which he gave on first making his appearance in the Court.

The general hum and buzz which had hitherto prevailed among the densely-packed auditory ceased as soon as he entered the dock.

It was strange indeed to see so many, many faces all so closely packed, and all turned towards one point.

It is not to be wondered at if the prisoner did shrink a little upon finding himself the focus of so many eyes.

But the action could hardly have been a momentary one, and then, having drawn himself up to his full height, he gave that rapid and searching glance around him of which we have just made mention.

But he dropped his eyes almost instantly.

Rapid as was his glance, it had nevertheless satisfied him upon one point.

Captain Hawk was in Court.

Dick wondered at his hardihood, for the recognition was instantaneous, and he only dropped his eyes because he was afraid that his friend might be indiscreet enough to make some sign.

The expression on the captain's face at the moment when he first caught sight of it was such as to make Dick feel that so far events had gone on well.

The silence which had greeted the prisoner's first appearance was of short duration.

A general murmur arose, so loud as to prevent the commencement of the business of the Court.

In vain the usher bawled for silence till he was as red in the face as the trimming on his robe.

It was not until the judge arose and positively declared that, at all hazards, the Court should be cleared, that anything resembling order was obtained.

The usual formalities observed on such occasions were then proceeded with.

But we will not weary the reader by describing them in detail.

The Clerk of the Arraignment rose, and read over the indictment.

The ceremony, however, appeared to be one which might very well have been dispensed with, for no one paid the least attention to it.

The judge held a whispered conversation with the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, who had taken his seat upon the bench.

The barristers at the table below amused and busied themselves in various ways.

At last the clerk stopped with a sudden jerk.

"Prisoner at the bar," he exclaimed, "you are charged upon this indictment with the crime of wilful murder. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" responded Dick, in a voice, though apparently low, was nevertheless distinctly audible in every corner of the Court.

The plea was recorded, and the business of the trial fairly began.

It was not until this moment that Dick noticed among the many influential gentlemen who had been accommodated with seats on the bench was his staunch friend, Sir Humphrey Yeomans.

The prosecution was conducted by the Attorney-General himself.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury," he said, in a rapid voice, "it is far from my intention to occupy your time and attention for many minutes on the present occasion. To those few remarks which I have to make, I earnestly desire you will give your entire attention.

"The prisoner at the bar is, I suppose, entitled to the claim of being considered one of the most notorious characters in the land. His misdeeds and daring defiance of justice are so well known that it is quite unnecessary for me to dwell upon them here.

"Aided by numerous well-paid accomplices, and by the poorer sort of people, whose good will he had gained by a few acts of interested liberality, he has succeeded in keeping at bay all the many parties of officers that have been sent out in pursuit of him.

"But that inevitable end which could have been foreseen by anyone, has come at last—his time of triumph is over—he is here in the dock before you on a charge affecting his life.

"In the case of such criminals as the prisoner at the bar (let us be thankful, gentlemen, that there are so few of them,) it is often felt to be a matter of some difficulty to fix upon some specific charge against them, and bring the accusation home to them.

"When such notorious offenders are secured after the expenditure of so much time and trouble, it almost seems that the formality of a trial could be done away with and the speediest steps taken for execution.

"But the English law is jealous of the rights of every man, even when all claim upon the forbearance of society is forfeited, as in the case of the prisoner at the bar.

"It is a matter of gratification to me—not merely that there is no difficulty in fixing upon a specific charge, but because the crime of which he is accused has been committed only a short time, and the evidence upon it is so

clear and complete as to leave no doubt of the prisoner's guilt.

"The crime is that of murder—the one which all mankind holds in the most abhorrence. As you are well aware, the penalty is death.

"Leaving out of consideration all the manifold acts of treachery which have been committed by the prisoner at the bar, we will try him on the present charge, for had he been ten times as guilty as he is the punishment would still have been death.

"I shall now proceed to call witnesses before you—having first read this deposition made by the expiring man—who will be able to show that on the evening of the 18th of the last month the prisoner at the bar did wilfully and with malice prepense, wound to the death one Samuel Thorpe, who held the situation of ostler at the Crown and Cushion, the well-known inn on the London Road."

The Attorney-General then read over the document containing the ostler's deposition.

As the reader is aware, it gave anything but a fair and just account of what had taken place, for it stated that Dick had, alternately by promises and threats, endeavoured to persuade the ostler to furnish him with a horse in order that he might complete his escape. With this demand the ostler stated he resolutely refused to comply, and in consequence the prisoner had drawn his sword and plunged it into his breast before he had time to step aside or defend himself.

The reader, being in possession of the actual facts as they occurred, will be able to see how grossly the mercenary and treacherous ostler misrepresented what had occurred.

Those witnesses who had appeared before the magistrate at the final examination now again stood forward and repeated the testimony they had previously given, which for the most part was correct enough.

"The medical evidence was given respecting the wound, and a proper certificate of the ostler's death.

With this, the case for the prosecution closed.

Mr. Steel, to the surprise of many in Court, then rose up, and, after glancing around, said:

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—

"I am not about, in the ordinary sense of the term, to defend the prisoner at the bar, but I am here to make to you a statement which he desires should go forth to the world.

"It is to affect that he is guiltless of the charge now brought against him. He solemnly avers that—"

The Attorney-General jumped up.

"My lord," he said, "I protest against this irregularity. If my learned friend has any evidence to offer on the part of the prisoner at the bar, well and good—let it be forthcoming; but if, as I imagine, he is only about to repeat some general declaration of innocence made by the prisoner, and unsupported by testimony, I submit that the present is not a fitting opportunity for doing so. I feel certain your lordship will support me in saying that the proper time for the making of such a statement is after the recollection of the verdict."

The judge ruled that his learned friend was right, and Mr. Steel sat down with his statement unmade.

The Attorney-General rose again.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury,—

"I cannot refrain from directing your attention to the singular manner in which the identity of the prisoner at the bar was discovered. The hand of Providence cannot be more plainly traceable than in this instance. The prisoner, maddened with drink, is taken prisoner and locked up without the existence of the faintest suspicion of who he was—so greatly has he altered during the last few months of his wretched existence.

"But for the merest chance he would undoubtedly have been at liberty again, when he would doubtless have succeeded in effecting his escape. But the ends of justice were not then to be set aside. He was called upon to find a surety for his future good conduct. This he could not obtain. Then it seems he wrote a letter to his brother, who is, I am given to understand, a worthy, honest man, requesting him to come forward and be bail for him. This letter was posted unpaid for, the brother refused to pay the postage, and the letter was finally sent to London to be opened and returned to the sender. It was then that the almost incredible discovery was made that the writer

was no other than the famous—or shall I say in-famous—Dick Turpin, and that he was at that moment safely within the walls of York Castle, while the police officers were vainly searching for him in every direction. His identification followed; and at the same time he was indicted for the wilful murder of the ostler at the roadside inn."

CHAPTER MXXVIII.

SENTENCE OF DEATH IS PRONOUNCED UPON DICK TURPIN.

WHAT is called nowadays a "sensation" followed the Attorney-General's remarks.

Such a strange concatenation of circumstances was well calculated to excite a more than common degree of interest.

The judge now proceeded to sum up the evidence.

The task was by no means a difficult one, and did not occupy him many minutes.

He dwelt upon the weight which always attaches itself to the testimony of one like the ostler, who made his statements in the full belief that he had not much longer to live in this world.

He referred, too, to the extraordinary manner in which Dick had been secured.

He observed how strange it was to think that, after so many fruitless efforts to capture him, he should at last so singularly be found in custody.

The evidence was so clear, he said, that he did not for his own part see how the jury could have any hesitation or difficulty about coming to a verdict.

The jury appeared to have no difficulty.

Those who sat on the front row of seats turned round to those behind them and exchanged a whisper.

Then all sat down, and the foreman rose up.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

This announcement took no one by surprise, for the simple reason that every person in Court had fully expected it.

"Prisoner at the bar," said the Clerk of the Arraignment, "you have heard the verdict. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

Dick leaned forward towards Mr. Steel, who whispered energetically for a moment.

Then the latter, turning round to the Court, said:

"My lord, the prisoner desires me to make the statement which I was about to give when interrupted by my learned friend. It is brief."

"He solemnly avers that he is guiltless of the crime laid to his charge. He does not pretend to dispute his identity; but he wishes it to be known that what the ostler has sworn to as his dying deposition is not actually in accordance with facts. The prisoner declares that the ostler offered to aid him to escape, provided he well paid him for doing so; but finding that more money was to be made by surrendering him a prisoner and claiming the reward, he resolved upon that course. Accordingly, he administered some drugged brandy to the prisoner, who did not discover it until he had swallowed a considerable portion of the liquor. Finding the plot discovered, the ostler rushed forward with the intention of overpowering him, and in doing so became impaled upon the point of the prisoner's sword, which he held out before him in an attitude of defence; so that it will be seen the ostler was actually the author and bringer about of his own death."

The statement was listened to attentively.

As soon as Mr. Steel sat down, the judge assumed the black cap, and proceeded to pass sentence.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, "you have this day been found guilty, upon the clearest evidence, of the heinous crime of wilful murder. You must know that your bare statement can have but little notice when weighed against the testimony of a man at the point of death, and who could have no motive for misrepresentation."

"But leaving this point, it is quite patent that you are guilty of innumerable crimes, all of which are punishable by death, and for this reason I feel no compunction in pro-

nouncing the sentence of the Court, which is, that you be taken hence to the place whence you came, and thence to the place appointed for execution, and that you be there hanged by the neck until you be dead; and may Heaven extend that forgiveness towards you which the law will not permit us to show on earth!"

An impressive silence followed.

The two men who had stood beside Dick during the whole examination now signified that it was time for him to depart.

Before leaving, however, Dick turned his eyes to the spot where Captain Hawk was sitting.

He was greeted in a moment by a reassuring smile.

That did wonders for Dick's heart, which had grown very—very heavy during the progress of the trial.

He would not have been human had it not done so.

But Captain Hawk's smile gave him hope, and held out the assurance that after all he might yet succeed in eluding the vigilance of his jailers and become a free man.

Dick was now conducted to a different cell to the one he had formerly occupied, though the resemblance between the two was so great that they could scarcely have been distinguished from one another.

Like the former one, this was situated near the top of the castle keep.

It had one small window near the ceiling—a window that was very strongly barred.

He was again loaded with fetters, and left to pass as best he might the brief time that was to elapse before the day came for his execution.

Dick longed earnestly for night to come.

He was anxious to climb up to the grated window and peep out, in order to ascertain whether it commanded the same view as the other one.

Fortunately, the small bunch of skeleton keys had not been found, and as soon as ever the last visit was paid Dick set to work to put his doubts at rest.

Practice had now rendered him expert in the removal of his fetters.

Having freed himself from them, he mounted up to the window by the same means as before—that is to say, by the aid of the chair and table.

The night was by no means a favourable one for observation, as there was no moon.

Still, he was enabled to discern after awhile the rooftops beneath him and the boundary wall.

Whether the watch was continued he was unable to ascertain.

Wearied out at length, he laid down to sleep.

As might be expected, his slumber was not a very calm or peaceful one.

It was disturbed by many images, and all of them of a painful kind.

As soon as the prison was opened to visitors, Captain Hawk appeared.

He was still disguised as a Roman Catholic priest, and, having Sir Humphrey's credential, no suspicion was felt about him.

The authorities were quite willing that the prisoner should be ministered to by a member of any faith he thought fit.

Captain Hawk played his part with more ability on this occasion than before.

He knelt down beside Dick, and while in this position slipped into the prisoner's hands a small steel saw.

It was a wonderful tool, most exquisitely made, of the best temper, and so small that there could be little or no difficulty in keeping it concealed.

"Dick," he whispered, "whatever you do, take care of that saw, for upon it depends your freedom."

"Fear nothing on that head," said Turpin. "Has all gone well?"

"Better than I could wish."

The manner in which this sentence was pronounced, more than the words themselves, revived Dick's hopes.

His eyes sparkled with something like their former lustre as he glanced at his companion and waited to hear more.

"The outside guard?" he said, interrogatively, finding the captain did not speak.

"It is removed."

"Removed? Are you sure of that?"

"There was no guard last night; and I heard a

whisper to the effect that it would not be renewed, as they were confident of your security."

Dick's lip curled with a derisive smile.

"It would be different if Skeilum lived," he said.

"No doubt. You have good reason to congratulate yourself upon his removal."

"And how have you planned my escape?"

"Very simply. This cell of yours is nearly at the top of the building."

"I know it."

"That grated window yonder looks into a small court-yard."

Dick nodded.

"You must work with the steel saw at those bars yonder until you are able to remove them at a moment's notice."

"But how shall I reach the court-yard? You see there is no material here by which a rope could be manufactured."

"I will supply you with one."

"How?"

"I shall find a means, never fear. You don't want it yet; such a bulky object could not be hidden very well. I shall contrive to let you have it on the night appointed for the escape."

"And when will that be?"

"It depends partly on yourself. How long would it take you to saw through those bars?"

"Two nights."

"That will give you plenty of time. On the afternoon of the third day from this, then, you shall have the rope."

"I shall be ready."

"When you reach the court-yard," said Captain Hawk, "you must cross it with all speed possible. Just opposite to you you will find a rope hanging down. Seize it and ascend. I shall be on the other side with a couple of good horses, and I hope we shall get some miles away before your escape is discovered."

Dick's heart beat faster.

"The plan is bold, simple, and straightforward."

"And therefore almost certain to succeed."

"I think so."

"Captain Hawk, you are a true friend. Would that our acquaintance had begun earlier, and that we knew each other better!"

"There is plenty of time for that, Dick. Depend upon it, there are merry days in store."

Soon after this, Hawk took his leave.

Dick was in a state of greater excitement, owing to the brilliancy of his hopes, than he had been since his capture.

He had no little difficulty in restraining his emotions within moderate bounds.

But, luckily, he did not meet with many interruptions.

His mind was now exclusively filled with one object; and all the day his eyes were fixed upon the little grated window, while he earnestly prayed for night to come that he might have the chance of making a trial of his saw.

On that day Dick fared sumptuously, for his appetite was good.

He had to pay, as we have said, a most extravagant price for all these luxuries; but Dick Turpin was about the last man in the world to trouble himself upon this score.

His dinner was washed down by a bottle of better wine than one could have fancied procurable within the walls of a prison.

After that, Dick felt in perfect readiness for anything.

Never did he have a more difficult task than the one of simulating patience while he was so anxiously longing for the coming of night.

As if to try him still further, the Governor was half an hour later than usual in making his rounds that night.

This half-hour seemed to Dick as long as a day.

When the visit was over, and when the Governor and his subordinates had retired, apparently under the impression that all was secure, Dick sat for a moment or two, and then freed himself from his fetters.

With all speed the table and chair were placed beneath the window.

Then mounting noiselessly, Dick peeped out.

All things below and around him were wrapped in darkness.

Deep silence prevailed.

Finding nothing was to be gained by observation, the prisoner, with a fast-beating heart, produced his saw and set to work with it.

The iron grating was old, but strong, despite the manner in which the rust had corroded.

Compared with the exquisitely-tempered steel saw, the iron bars seemed to be of some soft material.

Dick worked steadily and perseveringly.

Yet after an hour's arduous toil he seemed to have done but little, especially when compared with what remained to be done.

The iron bars would have to be sawn through in at least six places before he could hope to have the aperture large enough to allow of the passage of his body.

As yet he had produced but a slight impression upon one of these bars.

But he was working for his life and liberty; and when two such precious possessions as these are at stake no enterprise is deemed too difficult—no toil too great.

So it was with Dick.

He worked with a will, and when the time came when for safety's sake it was absolutely necessary he should desist, he was so fatigued that he could scarcely move.

With great care he blew away every atom of the iron filings, so that none of these would be seen, and so betray him.

He was, however, well satisfied with his labours, for he had certainly performed one half of his allotted task.

When the turnkey entered the cell at the accustomed hour, he failed to perceive anything unusual in the cell, or in the prisoner himself.

Having been not only awake, but at work, during the whole of the night, Dick stood greatly in need of rest, and as soon as he was alone prepared himself to sleep.

In a few moments he was profoundly unconscious of everything, and remained so until the removal of the heavy fastenings on the outside of the cell door aroused him.

Starting up suddenly, he was surprised to find that the day was already far advanced.

The opening door disclosed the form of the priest, who had come, as everyone in the castle who knew anything about it fully believed, to administer spiritual consolation to the condemned prisoner.

And in one sense so he had—the consolation of spirit, of which Dick considered himself most in need.

The very first glance at the captain's face assured the prisoner that all continued to go well.

There was no difficulty about communicating with each other, for the turnkey left them to themselves, as is usual in such cases.

"All goes on as you could wish?" were Dick's first words.

"Yes, most favourably. And you?"

"I worked during the whole of last night; but the bars are very thick, and will have to be sawn through in many places."

"It is a tedious labour."

"Very."

"But time will enable you to accomplish it."

"The task is half performed."

"Why, then, all is well. Work with equal vigour to-night, and to-morrow get what rest you can. You will have need of all your strength to-morrow night."

"I know it. And the rope?"

"You shall have it."

"But how?"

"I have hit upon the means," said Captain Hawk, with a satisfied smile, "and I think you will give me credit for a little ingenuity."

"I am all impatience to know it."

"Well, then, every day you receive a good dinner, do you not?"

"Certainly; but how—"

"Wait a moment, and you shall hear. When the turnkey comes in to-morrow ~~after~~, among other things, a fruit pie of some sort. The loaf of bread you will receive as usual."

"Yes—but—"

"Do not interrupt me. The turnkey always brings

you twice as much of everything as you want, because all that you leave he has himself."

"Just so."

"Well, then, I have found out the place where he is in the habit of procuring these delicacies for your table, and I have bribed the woman who serves him so heavily that she has consented to do all that I require."

"And that is?"

"To conceal one half of the rope inside the loaf of bread—the other half will be in the pie dish, covered with the crust."

"I see—I see. But will not these things be examined at the gate?"

"No. I have been careful to ascertain that."

"How is that?"

"If anyone sent you anything it would be most rigorously searched; but these things, you understand, come from a regular place of business, where the people could have no interest in befriending prisoners, and are fetched in by a turnkey. This is how it happens that the things escape scrutiny."

CHAPTER MCXXXIV.

CAPTAIN HAWK HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF DETECTION IN THE VESTIBULE OF THE PRISON.

"I see—I see!" responded Turpin, whose hopes rose higher. "Success is certain."

"I think we may really venture to think so. Of course, when the provisions come, you must observe every caution. It will be your fault if the turnkey has any suspicions."

"It will be my fault, and if it happens I shall be content to abide the consequences of it."

"That is enough, then. I will answer for the rest."

"But," said Dick, and then he hesitated as if in doubt whether to proceed.

"But what? Why do you pause?"

"Because I ought to feel certain I could trust you."

"Of course you can. But what was your thought?"

"I was wondering whether it would be possible to make a loaf and pie-dish hold a sufficient quantity of rope to enable me to escape. The cell window is a long way from the ground."

"I ought to have explained," said the captain, hastily; "and by no means wonder at your question."

"I might have known you would not have overlooked such an important point."

"The fact is, I have had the rope prepared especially. Being made entirely of silk, it is consequently very fine, and yet strong enough to bear ten times your weight. You need be under no apprehensions about a breakage."

"Pardon me—I see now it was simple enough."

"Ordinary rope," pursued the captain, "would have been by far too bulky to be serviceable; but this will be just what you require. At one end is a hook, which will enable you to fasten it readily and securely."

"A thousand thousand thanks! I feel now assured that the escape will be a successful one."

"Of course it will—why doubt it?"

"I do not."

"Then I will leave you. You understand what you have to do, because I intend this to be my last visit to the castle. The Governor tried to intercept me as I was leaving yesterday, and I want to avoid a meeting with him if I can possibly do so."

"Pray be careful," said Dick, with sudden alarm for the safety of his friend.

"I will be careful; make yourself quite easy on that score; I am not likely to forget that I hold your life in my hands."

"But for your own sake!"

"To tell you the truth, when there is no one else concerned beside myself I always laugh at danger—it is best to despise it."

"Still, be cautious—your life hangs upon a thread."

"A strong one, I hope. But let us leave this. I will repeat once more what you have to do: descend by the rope—cross the court-yard—seize the rope you will find thrown over the wall. On reaching the summit you will see me—another moment we shall be off and away as swiftly as the two best horses in York can take us."

Dick pressed his friend's hand warmly, and renewed his thanks.

"So simple a plan," he said, "and depending on so few contingencies, is certain to succeed."

"If you perform your part," responded the captain, "I have little fear of the result."

With these words the pair parted.

The captain pulled his broad-brimmed hat well over his eyes, and gathered his gown around him.

"If that confounded Governor is only out of the way," he muttered, as he followed the turnkey along the corridor, "all will be well."

The outer vestibule was quickly reached.

The captain drew a long breath when he saw the Governor was not present.

Ten strides took him to the outer door.

The man on duty thrust his key into the lock and was in the act of turning it when Hawk's quick ear caught the sound of a footstep, and some one behind him said:

"Ahem!"

The turnkey stopped unlocking the gate and turned round, for he at once recognised the voice.

"Reverend sir," said the Governor, hastening forward, "a word or two, if you please, before you go."

The captain was now, to use his own expression, "in for it."

The much-dreaded ordeal could not be avoided.

Now that this interview was inevitable the captain put a bold front on the matter.

Turning round, he bowed low, as though to intimate that he was entirely at the Governor's service.

"Ahem!" said the latter, again. "Myself and some others are anxious to know how you have succeeded in your interview with the desperate character we have now in custody?"

"I don't think he suspects me," thought Captain Hawk.

Then aloud he said:

"I think, sir, that I have no great reason to complain. Conscientiously, I may say that I have used my best endeavours, and have every hope that I shall succeed."

"Ah! that is very satisfactory. But as there is an uneasy feeling abroad respecting the prisoner, excuse me for suggesting that it would be still more satisfactory if he made a confession."

"He has confessed," said the captain.

"Confessed?"

"Yes, this morning."

"And has he signed it?" asked the Governor, eagerly.

"Not yet. But he has told me all from first to last. At his request, I am now about to commit the facts to writing in as brief a manner as I can. On my next visit he will sign the document, and after his execution he desires that it may be made public."

"And does he seem reconciled to his fate?"

"Through my exhortations, I think—humbly, of course—that I may say yes."

"That is very gratifying. I confess this was my own opinion. But there have been others professing to know the man who have stated that this apparent resignation of his is ten times more to be dreaded than any manifestations of violence."

The captain could not repress a smile.

The Governor noticed it, and said:

"You smile, reverend sir."

"It was at the thought of how much they were mistaken."

"Believe me, it is no slight relief to me to hear you say so. Until a moment or so ago, I had serious thoughts of renewing the outside guard round the prison, which some have said ought never to have been discontinued."

The captain, at hearing this, felt the perspiration start out at every pore.

"What is your opinion, reverend sir?" added the Governor.

"I do not like to take the responsibility of uttering it," answered the captain, with a hesitation and embarrassment which the Governor was far from attributing to its real cause; "but if I may speak from the apparent state of the prisoner's mind, I must say that I think there can be no need of it. He is, I believe, quite resigned to his fate. I must take my leave now," he added, "for I have much on my hands."

"And you will be here to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow, if possible; at any rate, on the next day."

Captain Hawk thought of those words afterwards, for when he uttered them nothing was further from his intention.

The Governor bowed, and retired.

The next moment Captain Hawk, to his intense satisfaction, was outside the prison.

Not until then did he venture to breathe freely.

"Confound him!" he ejaculated. "Renew the outside guard! That would be destruction to my plan. I am glad I know of this, for I should think twice now before I trusted myself inside those strong stone walls. Perhaps what I have said will be sufficient to prevent him from carrying out his intention. At any rate, I can only hope so."

In truth, it was no slight thing that Captain Hawk should thus have undergone the ordeal of a few minutes' interview with the Governor of York Castle.

He was not prepared to submit the excellence of his disguise to so severe a trial.

In the meanwhile, Dick, profoundly ignorant of the narrow escape of discovery his friend had just had, did nothing but felicitate himself upon the tempting prospect he had before him.

The means devised by Captain Hawk were so simple that the more the details were dwelt upon the greater seemed to be the probability of ultimate complete success.

His hopes continued to rise, and it may certainly be said that never was there enterprise about which he felt so sanguine.

Nothing of particular moment occurred to break the ordinary routine of life in his cell until after the Governor had paid his usual nocturnal visit.

When that was over, Dick renewed his work upon the iron bars.

He laboured with even greater energy than on the preceding night.

He did not stop to rest until he had cut deeply into every one of the bars in such a manner that they could be completely severed in an hour at the utmost.

The night was a rough and boisterous one—just such as he would have chosen for his projected escape, for while the wind was roaring so about the massive pile it was next to an impossibility for any slight unusual sound to attract notice.

On this occasion Dick had been careful not to lose the small iron filings, but had collected them carefully and mixed them with a small quantity of black dirt, of which there was a plentiful supply upon the floor and walls of the cell.

The whole he then moistened with some of the wine which had by accident been spilt upon the table.

Having worked the whole up into a soft mass, he applied it to those places where he had used his saw, and so concealed what he had done.

Of course, had anyone gone close to the grating, a single glance would have shown what had been done.

But it was not possible to detect that aught was amiss while standing on the floor of the cell, and this was enough, for Dick had not to dread any closer examination.

It was probably Dick's fancy which made him think that the turnkey looked more closely and suspiciously around the cell than usual.

But he saw nothing.

The active exertions he had made caused Dick to eat with a good appetite.

Doubtless this, being intended for his last day, would have seemed at least double the length of any other—but Dick was so completely fatigued that he fell into a deep sleep, and passed several hours of it in unconsciousness.

But his sleep was vexed with terrible visions, and when he awoke it was with a sudden start.

The perspiration stood out upon his brow in large drops.

He glanced round him wildly for a moment, and then seemed actually to derive consolation from the fact that he was safe in his cell.

"How horrible!" he murmured, in a hollow voice. "It was only a dream; but if I had another such a one I should dread to close my eyes again."

He shuddered from head to foot, and some time elapsed before he could shake off the effects of the terrible vision with which he had been visited.

The remembrance of what he had to do in a short time assisted him greatly in recovering his composure.

It was truly comforting to think that within all probability not more than four or five hours had to elapse before he should again be in possession of that most precious of all things—his liberty.

In the morning, at breakfast, he had, according to his usual custom, ordered his dinner, and was careful to carry out Captain Hawk's injunction.

At the usual hour the turnkey entered.

"A feast for a prince!" he said, as he placed the articles one by one upon the table. "I admire you, captain—I do indeed. I never knew anyone in this prison, all the years I have been in it, make themselves so comfortable and contented as you have. You look a hundred per cent better than you did when you came."

"I am, thanks to your attention," said Dick, with a smile.

"Well, perhaps so. All I can say is, if you manage to get through all you have on the table before you you won't hurt."

This was no doubt right.

There seemed to be enough for half a dozen men.

"I will try to do justice to it," said Dick.

"Do, captain. Take your time. If you want anything else you have only to call out. I shall be just on the other side of the door, that's all."

Dick was full of impatience for this man to be gone, yet he dared not manifest the least sign of this feeling.

Most difficult, however, was it for him to keep this control over himself.

On the table before him he saw the loaf and the pie-dish as well.

The moment the turnkey left him he seized the first-named article, being full of anxiety to satisfy himself that it really contained the rope.

Pulling the loaf apart, he found in the centre of it a quantity of silk cord.

There seemed to be very little, however, though he found it was rolled up tightly into the smallest possible compass.

It was very fine—almost too fine to enable anyone to grasp it firmly.

Dick hid this in a moment.

He did not doubt now that the remainder was in the pie-dish, so he prepared to eat his dinner.

He found himself able to do but scant justice to it, his thoughts being all the time fixed upon the pie.

His impatience increased to such an extent that he found it beyond his control.

He cut the pie with a trembling hand.

He was not disappointed.

The silk cord was there.

Pulling it out, he secreted it hastily, and finished his meal.

When the things were removed by the turnkey, Dick was in an agony of suspense for the Governor to pay his customary visit.

Yet much as he longed for, he justly dreaded this ordeal.

At the least symptom of anything suspicious, a search might be made, which would inevitably bring to light the much-prized cord, and so cut off all hopes of his escape.

Under the circumstances, Dick did the very best thing possible.

This was to place himself at full length upon the bench, with the cord beneath him, and to cover himself over with the rug, as though he had retired to rest for the night.

When the Governor entered, he affected to have been just aroused from a light sleep.

Nothing could have looked more unsuspicious.

The Governor glanced round him with a satisfied air; and, fully impressed with the conviction that the prisoner was perfectly safe, he left the cell.

"Ha," he said to the turnkey, as he strode along the corridor, "what a thing it is to maintain perfect discipline inside a prison! I never could account for escapes in

any other way than concluding that the Governors have been remiss in their duty. I never had an escape in my time, and never shall while I continue to make my regular nightly round."

From this it will be seen that the Governor returned to his quarters on this occasion in as comfortable a state of mind as can be imagined, little thinking how truly useless were those visits of inspection upon the importance of which he so prided himself.

When Dick realised that he was really left alone for the night, his emotions were so great that he was completely overpowered.

At last he managed to draw forth his skeleton keys, but his hands shook so, and his heart beat at such a rapid rate, that he could make no use of them.

That he should suffer no ordinary amount of excitement on such an occasion can readily enough be imagined.

At last, however, he managed to calm himself.

The letters were unfastened and laid upon the floor.

"In the morning," he said, "when they see them here, they will wonder by what mysterious agency I managed to slip out of them."

And to make this wonder the greater he re-locked them all again.

Then, mounting to the window, he commenced his work.

The night was by no means such as he could wish.

A slight breeze was blowing, which drove several detached masses of clouds across the heavens.

When the clouds covered the moon the obscurity was deep enough for his purpose; but the darkness did not last long, and when the cloud passed over it made the moonlight appear, by contrast, to be twice as bright as it really was.

But the attempt must be made.

With hearty goodwill did Dick work; and yet, for all that, rather more than an hour elapsed before he finished his work of sawing through the iron bars.

The top bar he did not saw quite through, but sufficiently to enable him to bend it in such a manner as to leave plenty of room for him to slip out.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RESULT OF DICK TURPIN'S ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE FROM YORK CASTLE.

HAVING reached this stage in his progress to freedom, Dick Turpin for the first time paused to rest.

Now that the grating was positively removed, it did indeed seem to him that the most serious obstacle intervening between himself and liberty was no longer in existence.

So great was his impatience that it had even hurried him on to doing it before he examined the cord which had been so cleverly delivered to him.

Nor did he seem in any hurry to do so.

Leaning his arms upon the edge of the opening in the wall—for window we cannot call it—he looked out upon the scene before him.

The rapidity with which he had worked had greatly exhausted him, and now, with sensations of the keenest delight, he felt the cool night air fan his temples.

He looked down at the boundary wall he had to cross.

When the moon's disc happened to be free from clouds he could see this plainly enough.

Then he looked for some signs of Captain Hawk with the horses he had promised.

A keen pang shot through his heart when he found he was not to be seen.

A moment's reflection, however, told him how foolish it was on his part to expect to see anything of the kind.

Captain Hawk would take the utmost pains to keep himself invisible.

Had he been seen by Dick he must have also been exposed to the view of anyone else who might happen to look out in that direction.

This was a danger he would never incur, as he would know if seen suspicion would be immediately excited.

"He is there all right," said Dick, after a pause. "I will not wrong him by doubting him for a single moment; beyond all question he will be as good as his word."

Being now considerably rested, Dick stepped down to examine his cord.

The opportunity was a favourable one, for the moon was shining into his cell with so much brightness that he had no difficulty at all in seeing what he was about.

When the cord was all unwound, and the two pieces joined together, he computed the total length to be between sixty and seventy feet.

This, he was quite sure, was more than long enough to reach from the highest point of the castle to the ground, so that all uneasiness on this head was at an end.

He tried it all, and found the strength very great; nor was it so difficult to retain a firm grasp upon it as he at first imagined.

At one end of the cord a strong iron hook was carefully fastened.

Having tested the whole to the best of his ability, and found it perfectly secure, he prepared himself to take a last leave of his cell.

His heart beat faster, and his breath came and went in sudden gasps.

Who could wonder that his excitement should now have risen to its highest pitch?

When he stood once more upon the chair, he trembled so with excess of agitation as to cause the structure below him to shake violently.

His first care was to secure the hook.

This was a matter of no difficulty.

He had left about two inches of the upright bar sticking up from the masonry, and a better place of fastening than this could hardly be conceived.

With shaking fingers he adjusted the hook, and pulled it to make sure that it was firm and that the fragment of the upright iron bar was sufficiently strong to sustain his weight.

All seemed well.

His efforts only served to make the rope more secure.

And yet at this moment he was conscious of feeling a powerful disinclination to trust himself to the rope.

It was one of those strange inward presentiments which we all feel at some time or other, and which are in general too apt to be disregarded.

The feeling grew stronger and stronger, and it required more than an ordinary effort to shake it off.

But Dick did so.

"This is folly," he said—"absolute folly and weakness. I could not have believed I was so childish. What have I to fear? All is well. The rope is strong and securely fixed."

Yet though his lips declared all to be well, his heart whispered all was not well.

"It is the ease with which I have succeeded that has made me so apprehensive. I will take effectual steps to put an end to it without delay."

So saying, he cautiously set himself to work to pass through the aperture, a proceeding that was by no means easy.

He took care to keep fast hold of the rope, and in less than a moment had fairly committed himself to it.

Slowly and carefully he suffered the silken cord to slip through his hands—lower and lower he went.

Half the descent was successfully accomplished—perhaps rather more than half—when, with frightful suddenness, Dick found the rope was no longer supported from above.

Whether the jutting-up piece of iron bar had broken away from the mortar in which it was embedded—

Whether the cord had snapped—

Or whether the iron of which the hook was composed had proved too light and weak to support his weight he knew not.

But his mind was filled with the awful and appalling consciousness that he was falling through the air.

The sensation was a horrible one.

Involuntarily, a dismal shriek thrilled from his lips.

It echoed far and wide in the silent air.

Then instantly came a horrid crashing sound.

It was succeeded by intense silence.

But this silence was of the shortest possible duration.

It might have been that the prison officials had become aware that the prisoner was no longer a tenant of his cell before that awful shriek arose which startled every body.

Be this how it may, it at all events, is certain that, with

the rapidity of lightning, lights appeared at the various windows of the castle walls.

A huge bell sent forth a sonorous clang.

Those booming sounds, striking the night air, would echo far and wide over the peaceful city, and at once apprise the inhabitants of what had occurred.

That bell was never tolled except on the occasion of an escape or a fire.

Dick lay upon the hard flagstones moaning slightly, and apparently being unconscious of where he was.

But where was Captain Hawk?

True to his engagement, he was at the proper spot at the appointed hour.

He was fully alive to the necessity of concealing himself from the observation of any of the officials or inhabitants of the castle, and this is how it happened that Dick could not catch a glimpse of Lisa.

There being no guard now round the interior wall, the captain had no fear of an interruption.

The horse he had hired for Dick Turpin's use he secured by the bridle to Satan's saddle, for he knew his own docile steed would obey him in all things by word of command, and that there was no need to subject him to any sort of restraint.

He held the rope in his hand which he told Dick would be found hanging down on the inner side from the top of the boundary wall.

At one end was secured a small leaden weight, so that he should have no trouble in casting his line over.

Feeling satisfied that all was well, and judging that the hour was close at hand when he might catch a glimpse of his comrade, he held himself prepared for immediate action.

He made his horse, Satan, stand close against the prison wall in such a manner that his side was pressed against the brickwork.

Then, holding the rope coiled up over one arm, the captain mounted; but, instead of sitting, stood up on the saddle.

This was rather a ticklish position to occupy.

Nearly all depended upon the horse, however.

Should the animal move, a fall would be the almost certain result.

But Captain Hawk knew that Satan would stand as immovable as the wall itself.

By reaching up his arms the captain could put his hands on the spike-protected coping of the boundary wall, and peep over.

He glanced about him rapidly.

He saw, in the first place, that the court-yard was empty.

That was a great satisfaction.

Glancing upwards, he was just in time to see Dick in the act of passing through the window of his cell.

He held his breath, and gazed with the intensest interest.

From where he stood the feat which Dick was attempting seemed, in good truth, a most perilous one.

The slender silk cord was invisible, and, in comparison with the huge mass of building, Dick looked like a fly upon the wall.

Until that awful moment when there ceased to be any support from above all went well, and Captain Hawk began to breathe more freely, and to think that, after all, the descent was not so terrible as it seemed.

Then he beheld his comrade fall, so suddenly that he could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses.

His first thought was that Dick must have lost his grasp in some way, but the same moment he saw that something had given way above.

The shriek was an awful one which pealed from the prisoner's lips when he felt himself falling headlong down.

Captain Hawk started, and uttered a faint ejaculation of horror.

He forgot the unsteadfast nature of his footing; and as it required considerable nicety of balance to stand upright upon the horse's back at all, it follows that this start caused him to slip and lose his foothold.

He made a desperate effort to save himself, and partially succeeded.

But for all that he fell heavily and awkwardly under the horse's feet, where he lay for a few moments half stunned and wholly unable to move.

At first he could hardly satisfy himself whether or not all that had just happened was a freak of his own fancy.

To satisfy himself, he struggled to his feet.

He was badly bruised by his fall, and the attempt cost him great pain.

Still more painful, however, was it to remount his steed.

Satan had never stirred.

Once more he peeped over the wall.

At a little distance from him, he could see Dick on the stones.

He was groaning faintly.

"I may be in time to save him yet, for he is not dead," was the thought that flashed like lightning across the highwayman's brain.

In a second he had thrown the weighted rope over the wall.

Having done so, there was no difficulty in securing it to the stout iron spikes.

By the time this was done, however, a door opened, out of which poured a large and well-armed body of men, many of whom carried such lights as in their haste and confusion they had had time to procure.

"Lost—lost!" ejaculated Captain Hawk. "I am too late!"

He was right.

The men, headed by the Governor, had formed themselves into a dense throng round the prostrate form.

To have attempted a rescue would have been an act of such utter madness that even the captain shrunk from it.

To have saved Dick would have been impossible, while he would have been quite certain to bring about his own capture.

The loud tolling of the bell still continued; and though so short a time had elapsed since the alarm was given, yet there were manifest signs that it had widely spread, for people came rushing towards the castle from every direction.

This boded danger to Captain Hawk, but he disregarded it, and continued gazing down into the court-yard like one fascinated.

Many were the ejaculations of wonder which fell from the lips of the assembled crowd when they saw Dick in the court-yard.

But the Governor, after one glance, guessed just what had occurred.

"Raise him quickly and gently, and carry him inside. Thank Heaven it is no worse!"

Apparently, the attempt to raise the fearfully-bruised form was productive of the acutest pain.

His groans increased until they became screams.

"I can't stand this," cried Captain Hawk, "not if I die for him!"

As he spoke he made a desperate effort to raise himself to the top of the wall.

In an ordinary way there is little doubt he would have succeeded in his endeavour.

But now, having so recently been hurt, he felt his limbs so stiff and sore as to make the attempt an abortive one.

Before he could renew it the whole party had passed through the doorway and disappeared.

He heard the ponderous door slammed to, and afterwards the clangour of the bars and bolts.

Dick was beyond his aid now.

With a heavy heart the captain placed himself in the saddle and rode slowly away.

"I would rather have given up my life," he murmured, with deep earnestness, "than such a calamity as this should have happened. What can I do now? What can be more unfortunate? My next step, I suppose, will be to resume my old disguise, and ascertain the extent of my injuries. There may be a chance that a second attempt may succeed; but I fear it—I sadly fear it."

Captain Hawk carried out the intention he had expressed.

Despite his own great personal danger in doing so, he presented himself at the earliest allowed moment on the following morning at the wicket of the prison.

Had he not known so well what had occurred, a glance would have told him that something very unusual had occurred to disturb the monotony of the prison.

"Your services will be needed, I think, holy father," said the turnkey, unobtrusively. "The prisoner made a desperate attempt to escape last night; but failed, and he



THE EXECUTION OF DICK TURPIN AT YORK CASTLE.

now lies more dead than alive on a bed where he is closely watched. Not that he is to be feared now, however—he cannot raise his hand.”

Captain Hawk was much distressed to hear this account of his companion, and hoped that he should find things not quite so bad as they had been represented to him.

Merely thanking the man for his intelligence, but taking care to express his astonishment at what he had heard, the captain passed on.

He was at once allowed to see the prisoner, He found two of the turnkeys in the cell.

The different things the captain had given Dick had been found, and the pair were speculating as to the means by which the prisoner had obtained them.

When the captain bent down over the bed, Dick's face lighted up with a smile of recognition,

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Hawk made a hasty and almost imperceptible sign for him to be cautious.

“You little expected to find me thus; but all is over now: I feel that I must resign myself to my fate.”

“Are you much hurt?” asked the seeming priest, in a voice of the deepest grief.

“No bones broke, the doctor says,” Dick answered, feebly. “He has caused me a thousand tortures by his examination. Would—oh, would that I had fallen a little further!”

He was compelled to pause and utter a groan.

The two turnkeys, having no suspicion that the priest was other than he seemed to be, without being requested to do so, withdrew to such a distance as to be out of ear-shot, though they could still watch the movements of their prisoner.

Seeing this, Dick whispered, in a low tone:

"Captain, I feel that I have not long to live. Do not shake your head, or attempt to convince me that I am mistaken; I cannot misunderstand my feelings now. I almost succeeded, but my fate is that I shall remain here. I know the worst, and so shall not shrink, but nerve myself as best I may to meet my doom. Were the prison doors thrown open to me at this moment, I am conscious that it would be of no advantage to me. I have an inward feeling which tells me that the injuries I have received are mortal ones. Besides, I could read that the surgeon's opinion was that there were no hopes of my recovery. What I long for is that I may be allowed to yield up my life in this place, and not upon the gallows."

Pain again compelled him to pause.

Captain Hawk was so much overcome by his emotions that he found himself unable reply.

He tried to gulp down the painful swelling that seemed suddenly to rise up in his throat and prevent all further utterance, but the endeavour was a vain one.

CHAPTER MCXXXVI.

THE PARTING OF DICK TURPIN AND CAPTAIN HAWK.— THE EXECUTION.—CONCLUSION.

DICK TURPIN fixed his lustreless eyes upon the captain's face, and went on:

"I do not fear death," he said. "Life has long had but little charms for me, now it has none at all. But I dread the scaffold—the gaping, gibing crowd, and the hateful hangman's loathsome touch—my sole surviving hope is that I may escape this."

He paused again.

"Never despair," said Captain Hawk, with an ineffectual attempt to appear hopeful himself. "I—"

Dick shook his head.

"I know," he continued—"I can understand how I feel; the consciousness is strong upon me that I have not many hours to live. After such injuries as I have received it is a wonder that I live at all—quite out of the question that I can recover. I feel, too, that this will be our last meeting, and so I wish you to listen to the few words I have to say."

"Speak—speak," said the captain, chokingly, for he could plainly see that his companion was not much longer for this world—"let me know all your wishes."

"There are but few—very few."

"They shall be as commands to me. Have no fears that they will not be carried out."

"After my death, then—do not interrupt me, because I know my death in one shape or other is certain to take place—I say, when all is over, endeavour to save my body from desecration by the surgeon. If you can get anyone to claim my body will be given up. Let it be interred in some quiet nook in a churchyard, where the grass will grow and the trees wave over me. That is all. Indulge my wish, but let us not waste precious time by dwelling upon this part of the subject. You give me your promise, do you not?"

"I do, most faithfully."

"Enough; and now for one more request. Should you ever visit London—"

"I will go at any moment to serve you."

"Nay, there is no emergency in the case. But when you are there again I want you to seek out one Matthew Gale. He is the landlord of a public-house in Drury Lane—the sign is the White Horse. It stands at the corner of White Horse Yard."

"I will not forget it."

"I want you to see him and make him acquainted with all the events that have taken place. Tell him my last thoughts were about him, and that there was hardly anything that caused me so much regret as my inability to see him."

"You may depend that this will be done."

"Thanks. When you see him you will see a true friend. At any risk or hazard to himself he will protect you from the officers. I owe him more than I can possibly express."

"And is there nothing more that I can do for you?" said the captain, sadly. "Think again, Dick—think again."

"Nothing," answered Dick Turpin, after a long pause. "I have said all."

"Then," murmured Captain Hawk, earnestly, "should the worst happen, you need suffer no anxiety on the score of what you have said to me. But, believe me, I have not yet lost all hope of saving you."

"There is only one way of saving me," answered Dick, "and that is, by giving me something which I can take, and so make sure of dying peacefully here before the arrival of the time appointed for my execution."

"Poison!" exclaimed Captain Hawk.

"Yes."

"Dick," he said, "I have called myself your friend, but I have done little yet in the way of friendship."

Turpin raised his hand deprecatingly.

"I have tried," continued the captain, "but no success has attended my endeavours. Still, I have sworn to aid you, and if I can do it in no other way than that which you have just named I will not shrink."

"Thanks—thanks!" was the faint answer. "That would be rendering me a service indeed."

"But I still hope to serve you better."

Dick Turpin, however, would not permit himself to derive any consolation from this.

"Farewell, captain!" he said, at length. "My strength is giving out so fast that I shall not be able to speak much longer. I repeat my wish that I had known you earlier, vain though that wish be. Bid me farewell, for we may not meet again."

There was more despondency about Dick when he pronounced these words than he had yet displayed.

"I will not say farewell," said Captain Hawk, speaking with a great effort. "But I—"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Dick—"indulge me!"

"Farewell, then!"

The parting words were spoken, and an opportunity was seized when the turnkeys did not happen to be looking that way to exchange a warm pressure of the hand.

Dick clasped the captain's convulsively.

But the muscles relaxed, and the famous highwayman, worn out by what had taken place, sunk back in a state of partial unconsciousness.

The captain seized upon this opportunity to withdraw.

He gave one lingering glance, for he seemed in the depths of his heart to be conscious that this was their last meeting.

He made his way somewhat precipitately to the vestibule.

He was dreading an interruption, for he knew that his feelings were anything but under his control, and if the Governor accosted him there would be great danger of discovery.

On gaining the vestibule he crossed over to the door with a swift stride.

It was opened, and he was in the act of crossing the threshold when he heard a voice say:

"Stop him!—stop that priest! Don't let him go yet!"

The tones in which these words were spoken carried to the captain the assurance that he was discovered.

It flashed into his mind instantly that he was suspected of having conveyed the tools to the prisoner—indeed, how else could his possession of them be accounted for?

The captain knew he could never stand the test of an examination, so upon hearing these alarming words behind him he, so far from pausing, gave a sudden bound forward.

It was well that he was so speedy in his movements, for the man on the lock hastened to obey the order which had been issued.

Darting forward, he managed to get a good grasp upon the captain's long cloak.

But Hawk uncloaked it in a moment, and fled with the utmost precipitation.

Fortunately, the corner of a street was close at hand, and he vanished round it in a moment.

The alarm inside the prison was immediate; but by the time a small party started in pursuit not a trace of the seeming priest could be anywhere discovered.

In York but one subject was discussed—the extraordinary and daring attempt to escape that Dick Turpin had made.

By common consent the priest was set down as an accomplice in the plot.

But the point upon which there was the greatest amount of discussion was whether the execution would

take place on the day appointed, which was the one succeeding that upon which Captain Hawk had paid his farewell visit.

The majority declared that the execution must be deferred on account of the serious injuries the prisoner had received from his awful fall—it was generally reported that he had not a single bone left that was unbroken.

Others, to use their own phrase, loudly declared that the "gallows would be cheated of its due."

Others, again, were strongly inclined to think that the authorities would make strenuous efforts to carry out the sentence of the law, even if the unhappy victim should be carried half dead to the fatal tree.

But those who thought this were in the minority, though their opinion was fortified by the circumstance that the preparations for an execution went on just as though nothing of an unusual character had taken place.

The greatest uncertainty upon the point prevailed in the old city until a very late hour at night, and then the rumour went that the prisoner had so far recovered that there would be no need for postponing the time originally fixed upon for the carrying out of his sentence.

Among the rest, Captain Hawk—who had managed to gain the shelter of the Old Chequers Inn—heard this rumour, but he resolutely refused to give it credence.

Having seen Dick such a short time before, he felt confident that he could not be taken to the place of execution so soon, and he treated the report as he would have done any other impossible rumour.

But on the following morning the rumour gained strength.

Captain Hawk sent the ostler out to make inquiries.

On his return, the captain was amazed to learn that the preparations were going on more actively than ever, and that everyone declared the sentence would be carried into effect that very day at noon.

Utterly disregarding his own danger, the captain started off.

His first discovery was that a troop of soldiers had arrived, and formed themselves in a circle round the scaffold and in a double line to the door of the prison.

To gain admittance was impossible.

"Alas—alas!" he cried. "Balked again! I cannot even render you the poor service of saving you from the gallows tree!"

Yet, in spite of all he saw, the captain clung to the idea that Dick was too greatly injured to be moved—he could not believe but that the authorities would wait until he had recovered before they proceeded to his immolation.

He did not know that the surgeon, acting under the advice and suggestions of those above him, had administered to the helpless prisoner copious draughts of a medicine which, but for one quality, would have been an invaluable preparation.

This compound caused an inconceivable amount of vigour to infuse itself into the hapless prisoner's aching limbs—he seemed to grow comparatively strong in the course of a few hours.

But the effects of this medicine were only transitory, and the worst was, that with the cessation of them came such a frightful exhaustion that it was next to an impossibility for the patient to rally.

But this was considered to be of no consequence in the present case—all that the authorities desired was that the prisoner should live long enough to be made an example of.

The potent drug produced a species of stupefaction upon Dick not unlike that which he experienced after drinking the brandy given him by the ostler—the feeling was not quite so strong and yet he was partially unconscious.

His mental powers were so much in abeyance that he offered no resistance to the will of his captors—he rose and moved mechanically anywhere that they might choose to direct him.

His limbs felt numbed and strange, but he was released from all that pain which only on the preceding day had been so excruciating.

Nevertheless, in a dim, vague way he was aware that he was about to be led forth to die; but even this knowledge did not serve to make him resist.

By the aid of the turnkeys, he was enabled to walk on that fatal morning to the outer door of the prison.

Here the usual kind of procession was made, Dick still being more like an automaton than a living being.

Not until this door was opened and the closely-guarded prisoner appeared did Captain Hawk believe that the execution was really about to take place.

The discovery of his error came upon him like a thunder-clap.

Before he had recovered himself, the prisoner, still aided by supporters, had traversed the short space intervening between the prison door and the scaffold.

It would be too painful to linger over the last moments of the hero whose career we have followed for so long with such deep interest.

Captain Hawk was powerless.

Had he been equal to a hundred men, or, indeed, had he had a thousand at his command, the result would have been the same. The authorities were armed at all points against a rescue.

All know how Dick Turpin met his fate. On reaching the ladder, he summoned up all the strength which he possessed, and ascended unaided. His limbs were not properly under his command—one leg trembled as if with the palsy. Anxious that the cause should not be misconstrued, he stamped down his foot with angry violence, and, by a last exercise of his indomitable will, regained the command over his shaking limb.

The executioner was busy with his rope.

He had run up the ladder first, and now he slipped the noose over the victim's head.

It was just at this very moment that all the sea of faces and the other varied objects around faded from before Dick's eyes, yet there was no quailing in that last glance.

He knew, though, that consciousness was going.

"Are you ready?" he said, in a hollow voice.

These were his last words.

"Yes," said the hangman, descending a step preparatory to "turning the prisoner off," as the phrase then went.

The operation generally consisted in pushing the shuddering wretch off the ladder, and leaving him to dangle at the gibbet's beam until life became extinct by that most painful and cruel of all deaths, strangulation.

But the office was not performed for Dick.

No sooner had the hangman spoke the word than, with a sudden bound, he threw himself off the ladder.

There was a sharp and sudden jerk, a convulsive plunge, and then all was over. He who may justly lay claim to being the Prince of Highwaymen had in a moment ceased to be. All that remained of him was an inanimate mass of clay.

And so, bold and defiant to the last, the gallant highwayman met his fate.

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Slowly the crowd dispersed.

At the appointed time the body was cut down and carried into the prison, preparatory to being handed over to the doctors for dissection. There were many practitioners anxious to secure so interesting a subject.

That is, provided no one came to claim the body, and this was scarcely expected.

Contrary to anticipation, however, the body was claimed and carried away.

On the following day the body was interred in one of the most picturesque churchyards in the outskirts of the City of York could boast.

Thousands followed the mourners; and when the grave at last was reached not a square inch of the churchyard was unoccupied.

Yet the day was one that was calculated to keep all those people indoors who were not brought abroad by necessity.

The cold was piercing, and the keen north wind brought with it clouds of frozen ice and snow.

The clergyman hastened to conclude the ceremony, and when the grave was filled up the crowd began rapidly to disperse.

Heedless alike, however, of the bitter inclemency of the weather and of his own personal danger, one individual, attired in black and muffled in a cloak, remained long after the last lingerer had departed.

His face was bent towards the ground, and had upon it an expression of great pain.

"It was Fate," he said; "and who can control that? All is over now! Had I possessed the power, he would, instead of lying here, be safe and well. But no one can blame me because I failed."

After these words, the reader will have no difficulty in recognising the speaker.

It was Captain Hawk.

He stood now only at the opening of one of the strangest and most vicissitudinous careers that ever fell to the lot of man.

But those vicissitudes and the strange events which happened on the night after Dick Turpin's burial cannot be chronicled here.

They will be found in the Second Series of Black Bess, which the writer confidently asserts will not be found inferior in the point of interest to the first.





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